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ABSTRACT

"Classroom Notes Plus" publishes descriptions of original, unpublished teaching practices or adapted ideas. Each issue also contains sections on Teacher Talk, Classroom Solutions, and Web resources. The August 1999 issue contains the following materials: Ideas from the Classroom-"Parody: Getting the Joke with Style" (Bonnie Watkins); "Keeping Organized" (Dianne Robinson); "Using Pop-Up Books" (Rose Reissman); "Students Stage Shakespeare" (Emily Moorer); Focus on Poetry-"Odes of Joy" (Mary Ann Paul); "Silhouette Poems" (JoAnn Livermore); "Building Creative Characters" (Cathy Bankston); Focus on Literature-"Noticing the Color Purple" (Mari M. McLean and Christine Gibson); "Practice with Critical Analysis" (Leslie Oster); "Using Themes in Literature" (Dorothea Susag); and Traci's Lists of Ten-"Ten Ways to Respond to Student Drafts" (Traci Gardner). The October 1999 issue contains these materials: Ideas from the Classroom-"Talking Back to Shakespeare" (Rosemary Laughlin); "Musical Introduction to 'The Call of the Wild'" (Faith Wallace); "Reading and Writing about Ethics" (Karin Hayes Callahan); "Students as Storytellers" (Lynda M. Ware); "Keeping on Track with a Class Log" (Regenia Weakley); Focus on Writing-"Reflection and Self-Evaluation" (Melissa Eckstein); "Family Lore" (Susan Dobbe Chase); and Traci's Lists of Ten-"Ten Unusual Sources for Research Papers" (Traci Gardner). The January 2000 issue contains these materials: Ideas from the Classroom-"Matters of Convention" (Edgar H. Thompson); "Reports from Private Eyes" (Julie Holmberg); "Good Reader Strategies" (Pam Mueller); "A Reading Log Handout" (Richard Roundy); Focus on Literature-"Revenge May Not Be So Sweet: Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Cask of Amontillado'" (Larry Johannessen); and Traci's Lists of Ten-"Ten Ways to Write about Style" (Traci Gardner). The April 2000 issue contains these materials: Ideas from the Classroom-"Star of the 21st Century" (Ronna L. Edelstein); "Achieving Focus with a Research Paper Triangle" (Kim Ballard); "The Living Word: Word Biographies in Vocabulary Study" (Andrew Allen); "A 'Novel' Academy Awards Ceremony" (Beverly Martin); Focus on Storytelling-

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"Kitchen Stories" (Rose Reissman); and Traci's Lists of Ten-"Ten Award Competition Activities (Plus FIVE)" (Traci Gardner). (NKA)

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# Classroom Notes Plus: A Quarterly of Teaching Ideas, 1999-2000

National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL

Classroom Notes Plus
v17 n1-4 Aug 1999-Apr 2000

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# CLASSROOM NOTES

A QUARTERLY OF TEACHING IDEAS

## In This Issue

From the National Council of Teachers of English

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CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS

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Photo: Elizabeth Crews

## Call for Submissions

*Notes Plus* invites your descriptions of original, unpublished teaching practices for consideration. In the case of an adapted idea, we ask that you clearly identify any sources that deserve mention.

To make your description as useful as possible to *NOTES Plus* readers, we suggest that you consider questions like these as you prepare your submission: What are the goals of the activity or classroom practice? What makes it especially meaningful for you and your students? How do you introduce this idea to students? In what ways do their interests and ideas help direct the course of this activity? What natural progression does this activity usually follow? How are students encouraged to reflect on their learning? How do you judge this practice to be effective? How would you change your implementation of it in the future?

Please submit double-spaced, typed copy. Receipt of your submission will be acknowledged by postcard, but acknowledgement does not guarantee publication. We are unable to return manuscripts, so please keep a copy. We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

All *Notes Plus* submissions will be considered for the print version of *Notes Plus*, for inclusion on the *Notes Plus* Web page (www.ncte.org/notesplus), or for use in the annual edition of *Ideas Plus*.

Send submissions to *Notes Plus*, 1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801-1096 or send e-mail to notesplus@ncte.org. For more information, call or e-mail Felice Kaufmann at NCTE Headquarters: 1-800-369-6283, ext. 3648; fkaufmann@ncte.org.

▶ *Ideas Plus Book 17*, the annual companion volume to *Notes Plus*, will be mailed in October.

*"Teaching without zest is a crime"*

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*Watch for additional* **Tips** *throughout this issue!*

# IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

If you're new to *NOTES PLUS*, welcome! If you're a longtime reader, we hope you enjoy the revised look and increased page length.

We want *NOTES PLUS* to be a valuable resource for you; in this new format we can include more of your contributions—innovative teaching ideas and activities; tips for classroom management; recommendations of books and Web sites; and other useful suggestions for teaching and learning in the secondary English classroom.

Remember to visit the *NOTES PLUS* Web page at www.ncte.org/notesplus—we'll be posting new material there in conjunction with each issue of *NOTES PLUS* (now published in August, October, January, and April); we hope eventually to add updates every few weeks.

If you have any comments, suggestions, or content ideas for the new improved *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS*, we're eager to hear them.

We also welcome your submissions; see the submission guidelines inside the front cover. Send e-mail to Felice Kaufmann at fkaufmann@ncte.org or write to *NOTES PLUS*, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

## Parody: Getting the Joke with Style

Students always want to know, "Why do we have to do this?" When teaching parody, you can first tell students that parody is an important element of literature; you can then tell them that they need to understand parody in order to get the jokes when they read.

Parody, a literary composition that imitates the style of another work, is entertaining fare in many literature texts. Bret Harte's parody, "Muck-a-Muck" pokes fun at Cooper's use of stuffy diction in *THE DEERSLAYER* by using yard-long words. In addition, Harte exaggerates Cooper's last minute rescue and perfect hero.

Students love to turn this prose selection into drama and act out the grandiose parts, complete with imaginary rifles and jump-into-the-air death scenes. By studying Harte's parody, they better understand Cooper's style in creating the new genre of the adventure story.

An effective way to introduce this unit or any other parody is to show students parodies in other mediums. Gary Larson, of *Far Side* fame, is a master of parody. He often bases his cartoons on literary allusions that he parodies. In one cartoon, a dalmatian in a pulpit is fussing at a congregation. The caption reads—Hellfire and Dalmatians. Explaining this while American Literature students are reading Jonathan Edwards' *"SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD"* provides a good explanation of the terms.

Starting with the most obvious references that students are likely to know gives them the excitement of "knowing the joke" and explaining it to the rest of the class. Later, more obscure references can teach them allusions they may not know.

Another Larson work is the *WIENER DOG CALENDAR*, published in 1993. Here, wiener dogs appear in parodies of famous art. Showing students the corresponding work of art is an excellent visual means of understanding parody and teaching some art history as well. The *TIME-LIFE*

## Classroom Solutions

### A Metaphor for Revising and Editing

I recently came up with a metaphor for revising and editing that my students really seemed to relate to.

Most computer and video game buffs know that once a piece of software is written, it is always "beta-tested" with all sorts of people who have varying levels of computer (and game-playing) expertise. Their job is to inform the software makers of problems they have with the software, as well as what they like and don't like.

Revising and editing, I told students, is like beta-testing. Your writing may seem perfectly fine to you, but until you test it on a reader you have no way of knowing whether it conveys what you want it to. Obviously, you test it yourself, first. Then you test it on others.

"Does the beta-testing reflect on or diminish the quality of the software?" I asked them. Clearly not. "Similarly," I went on, "the need to edit and/or revise does not reflect on the quality of your writing." You get the picture.

**Ben Welsh**
**bhwelsh@aol.com**

*Many of the e-mail contributions in this issue are reprinted from NCTE-talk, an electronic discussion group sponsored by NCTE. To read interesting discussions on a variety of topics related to secondary teaching, choose the NCTE-talk Archives from the NCTE Web page at www.ncte.org.*

*Library of Art* book collection contains excellent, full-color, large page reproductions of famous art works. Talk with students about why it is that the funniest parodies are the ones that are based most closely on the original work.

Since most students love music, this medium can be very useful in teaching parody. Many students are familiar with Weird Al Yankovitch. His songs parodying other well-known songs are good discussion starters. Again, in comparing the lyrics of the parody with the original lyrics, students see that the best parody comes from close attention to the original work.

*In comparing the lyrics of the parody with the original lyrics, students see that the best parody comes from close attention to the original work.*

A logical progression in a literature class is for students to write parodies of literature. Because they are short in length, poems work well. One poem that lends itself to parody is Phyllis McGinley's "LAMENT OF THE NORMAL CHILD." Here, the speaker laments that she gets no attention because she is absolutely normal; only the problem child gets attention. Suggest to students some other possible laments: the tall child, the second child, the last child. They will take off with many more ideas. Here are some poems that resulted from this assignment:

**Lament of the Poetically Challenged**

It's three a.m.
and the moon is out.
But I have no idea
What to write about.
I need to think
Of something clever,
But it seems to be
Such a fruitless endeavor.
Fragmented phrases
Flow futilely through my mind,
But the right words to use
I simply cannot find.
If only I had
The gift of rhyme, poetry wouldn't be
Such a mountain to climb.

—Kim

## Look for more on the *NOTES PLUS* Web site!

For more teaching ideas, related articles, favorite strategies from past issues, and links to useful Web sites, visit the *NOTES PLUS* Web page at www.ncte.org/notesplus. Among the new postings:

### *Shakespeare Scavenger Hunt*

*Turn a contrived exercise for teaching research skills into a lively supplement to a Shakespeare unit.*

### *Building a Bridge to MACBETH with Cormier's THE CHOCOLATE WAR*

YA literature helps students connect with Shakespeare—
"I think Macbeth's acting just like Archie, thinking he's too cool to ever get burned!"

### *Reading by 9, Still Reading at 19*

*Some suggestions for books to hook students who have yet to develop the reading habit*

### *Tears at the Wall*

*How, Dan Nukala wondered, could he convey to his students the immediacy and impact of a visit to the Vietnam Memorial?*

### *Decreasing the Paper Load*

*A handy list of time-saving strategies*

### *Teacher Talk*

*Classroom advice gleaned from the e-mail discussion group NCTE-talk*

### *You Can't Afford Not to Read Aloud*

"For all you know, a witch may be living next door to you right now. . . . She might even be your lovely schoolteacher who is reading these words to you at this very moment."

*With the help of Roald Dahl's "The Witches," Joan Jennings has her seventh-graders clamoring for their daily read-aloud time.*

### *Poetry Page*

*Tips and resources for teaching poetry to young adults*

Slipping in a discussion of irony after reading this poem is an easy transition to teaching another literary term.

Here is another student poem where the parody is more serious:

**Lament of the Lost Life**

I'm not at all addicted.
I can stop at any time.
I only have a few shots with salt and lime.
I go to the bar almost every night.
I don't come home 'til morning light.
The bartender asks if I want another drink.
I answer yes before I can think.
My habit is like the wind—It never stops blowing.
I've tried to stop with just one drink
But I keep going.
I've lost my family;
I've lost my wife.
The last time I sobered up,
I realized I'd lost my life.

—Jenny

William Carlos Williams, champion of the ordinary phrase and subject, wrote the often-anthologized "This Is Just to Say"—a poem written in the form of a quick note, in which the speaker aplogizes for "eating the plums out of the icebox."

Here's a student parody of the Williams poem:

**This is Just to Say**

I have taken your dress
that was in your closet
and which you were going
to wear
to the dance.
Please forgive me.

# TEACHER TALK

## Getting the School Year off to a Smooth Start

*These messages are reprinted with permission from NCTE-talk, NCTE's electronic discussion group for secondary teachers.*

*You can subscribe to NCTE-talk by sending the following message to majordomo@serv1.ncte.org: subscribe NCTE-talk. You can also subscribe from the NCTE Web site: www.ncte.org/lists/ncte-talk/index.html.*

In the beginning of the year I had the students "think, pair, share" (think to self + make notes, discuss with partner, share with class) on this question: "What are the qualities of a good teacher?" The students had a great time thinking up these qualities. I promised that I would work my hardest toward achieving most of these qualities. I asked them to help me by using this language to "grade" me when we did evaluations.

The next day, we brainstormed qualities of a good student. I asked students to pick out their three strongest and three weakest qualities. We put all of this in our journals and revisited them often. I typed up lists of these qualities and posted them in the classroom (after class discussion, we usually ended up removing one or two items from the final list).

I am going to ask the students to write journal entries on these qualities and perform self-evaluations before teacher-parent meetings.

My rules are PPP—prepared, polite, and participating students! Of course we have to go through many class discussions to get there, but in the end it works pretty well and covers all situations.

***Donna L. Davis***
***dldavis@bewellnet.com***

Ask your students to journal for you. They draw a line down the middle of a sheet of notebook paper and, on one side, list behaviors that they believe will help create a well-run, orderly classroom that allows learning to be easy. On the other side, ask them to list behaviors that make classrooms chaotic, tension-filled, and inefficient.

Collect the journals, look through them, share some with the class, and ask them to help you write guidelines for their class. The students already know what a good classroom needs to operate—they've been in school for 10 or 11 years already.

Another idea someone once gave me—teach the motto "RESPECT, RESPONSE, RESPONSIBILITY." I often start off the year by writing these words on a bulletin board or poster paper in bold capital letters. If a class respects each other, learns to respond thoughtfully (not react without thinking), and accepts responsiblity for their own property and their actions, a class will run very smoothly.

After I draw students' attention to this motto, we talk about the words as a class and come up with a bit of role-playing about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

***Cindy Adams***
***cellen2@aol.com***

It is beautiful, bold and brilliant
on me,
but not on you.
—Heather

In American literature, students can parody Ben Franklin's proverbs from *POOR RICHARD'S ALMANAC*. "Early to bed, and early to rise" can become "Late to bed and late to rise" (more popular with teenagers) or the early bedtime can "make a man boring, bogus, and no surprise." Students enjoy working in groups for this project.

In addition, students can illustrate their proverbs. This can run the gamut from calligraphy and pen and ink sketches, to fancy computer fonts and graphics, to cutting and pasting magazine illustrations and adding text to create personal almanacs.

An extension of the parody concept is to have students create "pattern poems." Walt Whitman's lengthy prose poems, for example, make easy models after which students can pattern their own poems. Students might also write "riddle" poems as Emily Dickinson does in "a narrow fellow in the grass" (the snake). Another useful model can be seen in Edgar Lee Masters's *SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY*, in the epitaphs of the speakers from the grave.

Parody and pattern poems are entertaining and instructive ways to teach literature. Students usually enjoy the challenge of "getting the joke" and delight in explaining it to those who do not get it the first time. Often, they also create memorable poems.

***Bonnie Watkins, Hyde Park High School, Austin, Texas***

## Keeping Organized

My colleagues laugh when I mention organization, because I'm the original right-brained lefty, with *piles* instead of *files*. But that doesn't mean I don't try!

For an idea exchange some time ago, I submitted an idea for keeping notebooks of my material by unit or course. I found that it proved useful to many like myself, so I've developed some additional ways to keep organized.

I have found that plastic sheet protectors are an excellent way to preserve lecture notes, keep worksheets (that I have filled in ) handy, and keep quiz keys within reach (though I make sure to keep quiz keys in opaque protectors).

By placing all these items that I reuse in plastic sleeves, I can find them more easily, they store easily in the notebook, and they are less likely to get lost on my desk. Simple, I know, but some of us need all the help we can get.

The other method I have adopted is using colored file folders: blue for worksheets, red for tests and quizzes, and yellow for general information handouts, maps and project guidelines.

For me, this keeps everything reasonably organized and also keeps material out of the wrong hands. (Nobody gets near my red folders!) I use fluorescent-colored folders for things relating to my extracurricular duties and grade files.

Since I give so many quizzes over a term, I also keep a file for each student in the classroom for all quizzes and tests.

While student writing is theirs to keep when I return it, I use many tests and quizzes from term to term, so I keep these in the classroom. Having them in a folder allows me to keep track of a term's worth of work continuously.

Students may come in during study hall or after school to go over the quizzes before tests if they choose. This also gives me a body of work to show a parent during a conference, rather than just numbers in a grade book. Parents can see for themselves how their children are doing.

Papers the students use often in class, such as certain maps, genealogy sheets, or class procedures, I photocopy on colored paper. Again, it makes it much less likely that these will be misplaced, and makes them easier to find in a folder or notebook.

These are simple ideas that are extremely helpful and relatively inexpensive. I just wish I'd discovered them earlier.

***Dianne Robinson, Fairfield High School, Fairfield, Ohio***

## Using Pop-Up Books In Middle School—and Beyond

Although I am over forty, have no young children, and have taught on the secondary level for two decades, I still find myself drawn to pop-up books. Often I find myself surreptitiously reading, touching, pulling, pushing, and experiencing a particularly engaging pop-up book in the children's section of a bookstore. Usually I then take at least one of the books to the cashier and say it's for my niece (although I really wouldn't part with it).

Over several years, I have developed a two-shelf section of pop-up books in my home library. One day I slipped two of these treasures, including one on the Titanic, into my book bag to share with a colleague. During the student reading period, I took out my pop-up books. Several students drifted over and to my surprise began examining the pop-ups with reverence.

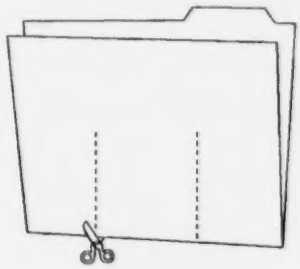
"This is really neat!!" "You know there is a lot of stuff in this that I could use for my research paper on the Titanic. Wonder if Mr. Benjamin will allow it." As I observed the students' interest in the pop-up books, it occurred to me that if a middle-aged teacher could be charmed into buying pop-up books, and "sophisticated" 6th and 7th graders gravitated to them on their own, who was to say that pop-up books were for children only? I decided to

put a little bit of "pop-up book design" into my student project options.

Since I noted that there were many pop-up versions of fairy tales which were often written on a sixth to eight grade level or beyond, I offered my students the option of creating their own pop-up versions of their independent readings.

In preparation, I brought in a stack of regular new manilla file folders (old ones can be recycled for this activity as well) and gave the students a mini-workshop on how to create a pop-up book page.

Actually the workshop consisted of a "two-cut" demonstration, where the students were shown how to strategically place two straight scissor cuts in the fold of the manilla file folder to create a pop-up box.



I explained to the students that this was the simplest design format. They could also elaborate by adding lift up flaps, three dimensional accordion boxes (made by folding a sheet of paper back and forth on itself in thin strips), figures made of felt or pipe cleaners, and whatever their imagination allowed.

As part of our "Pop-Up Production Workshop," I asked that students bring in a poem or a news article to "interpret" in the pop-up book format. I figured that these short pieces could be transformed into pop-ups within a period or two of class time.

With their selected poems and newspaper articles in hand, students happily set to designing their pop-ups. To my surprise, many students asked for additional folders, after they found that their ideas couldn't be accommodated on a single folder. I also asked that they record (or just be prepared to share) their decision process.

The poetry pop-ups, in particular, were profusely illustrated 3-D living creations. The next class period was devoted to student presentations and descriptions.

One student chose to tackle Nikki Giovanni's poem "Ego Tripping," and created a six-folder pop-up display. For stanza one, he created 3-D versions of "the Congo," "a pyramid," and "the sphinx," as well as a map of the Congo.

For stanza two, where the poet describes herself as sitting on the throne and her "oldest daughter. . . [as] Nefertiti," the student depicted an enthroned Cleopatra-type pop-up. For another stanza referring to "My son Noah built new/ark.../I stood proudly at the helm" featured an exquisitely crafted ark of popsicle sticks with a Cleopatra figure of felt and a cutout of an Old Testament figure on the ark. The final stanza "I can fly/like a bird in the sky" included a small black bird that could be pulled by string to the top of the file folder.

This student's written record of his design process discussed how he had carefully reread the poem several times and copied down images he could craft, draw, or represent in his pop-up. He first had hoped to "get done with the poem pop-up" on one manilla file folder; but then realized he needed many folders to do justice to the poem.

In a similar fashion, one student who had selected Langston Hughes's "Theme for English B" as her poem for pop-up transformation admitted she really hadn't "done it right," and extended her original four pages to seven pages.

Her "pop-up" layout included a three dimensional black board with a homework assignment to complement "write/

## Suggested Pop-Up Books

D[illegible] by Dot and Sy Barlowe. Random House, 1977.

E[illegible], by Robert D. Ballard. Illustrated by James Dietz. Turner Publishing, 1992.

T[illegible] by Clement Hurd. A Pop-Up Book based on the book by Margaret Wise Brown. Harper Collins, 1987.

G[illegible] Box, by Linda Milstein. Illustrated by Jean Hirashima. Random House.

A[illegible], By David Pelham. Simon and Schuster, 1991.

ABC D[illegible], by Jan Pienkowski. Lodenstan Books, 1993.

P[illegible] and the Wolf, by Sergei Prokofiev and Barbara Cooney. Penguin Books, 1986.

M[illegible], by Sohn Roddie and Anthony Paul. Priat Books, 1993.

a page tonight/and let that page come out of you." A full page showed a young African American male with the lines "I wonder if it's that simple?/ I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston Salem." The student designed a map pullout to show "The steps from the hill lead down to Harlem/through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas . . . " For the questions asked by the speaker in the poem, this student made a flap which the reader lifted for the answers. The final pop-up was a sheet with a heading "Theme for English B" to go with the closing line of the poem. "This is my age for English B."

In her explanation of her pop-up book product, the student said that making the pop-up helped her easily "see" and "experience" the feelings of the student speaker in

Tips

## DeLantae's Kiss, or, Teaching ROMEO AND JULIET in High School

Teaching Shakespeare to high school students is stimulating and rewarding—"mainly," as Huckleberry Finn would say, I have been profoundly influenced by the ideas of J. L. Styan, and agree with George Slover that "for high school students, the way of the actor is a surer way to ownership of a Shakespearean text than the way of the scholar and critic."

I am convinced that most adolescents learn most about Shakespeare when they are saying Shakespeare's words themselves, preferably while moving around in an area designated "stage" as they do so, instead of sitting at desks. I believe, in Styan's words, in "letting Shakespeare do the teaching. . . . "

I do not teach "acting"—I couldn't, even if I wanted to—I use performance as a way into the text. For example, the word "drawn," on the page, puzzles a student starting Shakespeare. When he is being Tybalt, and his friend is being Benvolio, and both have swords in their hands, and he says, "What, drawn and talk of peace?" its meaning is clear.

The "meaning" of much of the figurative language is not so immediately clear, and a few students are never really sure about what's being *said*. Lines like "She hath Dian's wit / And in strong proof of chastity well armed,/ From love's weak childish bow she lives unharmed" are always going to baffle some. The DeLantae of the title enjoyed swaggering around with a sword, but would reply to my every question about the meaning of what he had just read (and read with some feeling), gazing at me sweetly and sincerely with his large, expressive brown eyes, "I haven't got the slightest idea."

My emphasis, at this tenth-grade level, has to be on understanding the broad outlines of the scenes. My hope is that saying Shakespeare's words and hearing them will bewitch [students], put them under a spell, so that they will come to love it without knowing why. Sometimes this happens, and students go around for weeks after we've finished the play, quoting lines to each other.

On the other hand, there will always be a few who think the story of *ROMEO AND JULIET* is fabulous, and the movie version "awesome," but never understood why, as one frustrated student put it, "they all talk like they tongue-tied. . . . "

*I am convinced that most adolescents learn most about Shakespeare when they are saying Shakespeare's words themselves, preferably while moving around in an area designated "stage" as they do so.*

***—from "DeLantae's Kiss or Teaching ROMEO AND JULIET in High School," by Louisa Newlin. Reprinted from the NEBRASKA ENGLISH JOURNAL (Spring/Summer 1990).***

**Read the full text of this article on the *NOTES PLUS* Web page at www.ncte.org/notesplus.**

**Also see these new postings:**

- "Improvisation and the Language of Shakespeare's Plays" by Randal Robinson—an article on helping students use improvisation to help them "animate, enjoy, and profit from the language of Shakespeare's characters."
- "Building a Bridge to Shakespeare's *MACBETH* with Cormier's *THE CHOCOLATE WAR*," by Margo Figgins—an excerpt from *TEACHING SHAKESPEARE TODAY* (NCTE, 1993).

Hughes's poem. She noted "Making the map for his route and doing the bubbles for his thoughts really got me into his character."

Most students saw the poetry pop-up transformations as the most difficult. One student who chose a newspaper story instead commented, "You can just take out the pictures and the headlines and even some of the article to put in your pop-up." This student selected the story of Tabitha the missing cat, who logged more than 30,000 miles when she got lost in the cargo section of the aircraft. But even this student wound up creating four pop-up pages. As she explained, "You need a white pop-up page for the cargo area . . . one page for the outside of the plane and the story of how Tabitha got out of her box . . . one page for Tabitha's owner to tell her side . . . and one page for Tabitha at the water faucet."

As I examined and assessed the students' pop-up creations, I realized that this project had actively engaged many students who were never that excited about English class. These were what Howard Gardner (1983, 1991) would call the "spatial" and "kinesthetic" learners. It also offered students who were inherently linguistic a challenging problem construct—the transformation of a poem or an article into pop-up format; which involved them in making verbal/visual linkages, isolating pertinent data from the material, and deciding how to represent it for a pop-up.

We displayed our pop-up newspaper and poetry transformations at the District Language Arts Fair. Many of the stu-

## Classroom Solutions

### Shy Students

Obviously, different people have different reasons for being shy, and these reasons greatly impact "what to do with them." Here's something I have tried.

Throughout the year, we talk a great deal about group dynamics, and try to understand students' roles in different family, social, and school groups. We talk about how these roles influence their perceptions of themselves and others. Most importantly for our class, we try to understand how their roles affect their voices in class decisions and discussions. Who speaks and what does this mean for the group? We talk about what their comfort zones and stretch zones are, and we make deals so that each student practices her or his "stretch zone" at least once a week. They then write about this experience in their response journals.

However, it is always clear for the "shy quiet ones" that their thoughts are important if not always heard, and I ask them to daily write their observations about class discussions in their response folders if they choose not to participate in every discussion.

These responses open up great opportunities for me to try to figure out what is going on in students' brains while the rest of the class is talking a mile a minute, and in several cases, it has opened up great opportunities for us to talk about how and why it is difficult for them to share their thoughts with the rest of the class. A beautiful moment one young woman who was painfully shy developed a wonderful writing relationship with me. I don't think we ever had as wonderful a conversation in person as on paper!

Between her thoughtful musings about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, she began to write about her fears of speaking, her comments at home consistently prompted scoffs from her family, and she was convinced that her classmates would do the same. I didn't try to convince her that they would always receive her comments well, since speaking out is always a risk. I simply listened and encouraged the reflectiveness of her writing.

She NEVER spoke in a class discussion until the end of the year, when there was a particularly heated argument going on about some 'dynamics' which had developed in the room. This young woman raised her hand, and in the midst of yelling, everyone in the room became silent and turned towards her. In a hushed voice she gave the most insightful analysis of the situation I'd yet heard. After she was finished, there was a moment of silence, and her classmates began to speak in amazement about how much they appreciated her speaking, and began to reflect in a more focused way about what was going on.

Needless to say, I have a soft spot for the shy quiet ones, and often find that their quiet voices carry more weight in the midst of noise when we give them the encouragement to use them.

**Maja Wilson**
**mcfarlane.wilson@mail.riverview.net**

## Shakespeare on the Web

I recently taught "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to sophmores. Initially, I found the task of teaching Shakespeare daunting, but I found the Web sites listed below very helpful. I used the first Web site, for instance, to give students a mini-lesson on word order and word omissions. When I told students that there were ways in which they could break down Shakespeare's language and that I was going to give them some hints and tools to do that, they really listened.

This Web site is a useful and accessible guide for teaching about word order and word omissions:

http://www.ulen.com/shakespeare/students/guide/page1.html

This site has the complete works of Shakespeare —ideal for copying classroom sets of a play:

http://www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/Comedy/works.html

This site includes links to sites about Shakespeare and the Renaissance. Among them is a site that offers the complete works of Shakespeare online:

http://www.elizreview.com/links.htm#General

This is the official Web site of The Folger Institute of Shakespeare in Washington, D.C., which houses the largest collection of Shakespeare's printed works:

http://www.folger.edu/

The official Web site of *Shakespeare Magazine*—a magazine devoted to teachers and Shakespeare enthusiasts:

http://www.shakespearemag.com/

This is a cool one: "Shakespeare—Chill with Will"! A Web site devoted to helping high school students learn to love Shakespeare:

http://www.thinkquest.org/tqfans.html

This site includes biographical information, a timeline, and a Shakespeare quiz:

http://daphne.palomar.edu/shakespeare/

***Jen Farnham***
***Farnhamjl@aol.com***

The Shakespeare Corner at this site is well worth a look for ideas for high school students:

http://www.bell.k12.ca.us/BellHS/Departments/English/Curriculum.html

***Pat Vester***
***pvester@rt6.com***

dents started including the pop-up transformation as one of their literature scrapbook options for independent reading. In fact, one student told me that the storyboarding of literary passages that the class had learned to do was a good way of plotting out potential Pop-up pages.

As a result of student suggestions, I expanded the original options to include a "Pop-Up Poet's Book Project," which allowed students to create a pop-up book of at least five of a particular poet's pieces, plus an ongoing "Pop-Up Never-Ending News Story" project, in which students created pop-ups over a period of weeks, tracking a single news story.

The enthusiastic student response to pop-ups, the many possibilities for learning and collaboration, and the ineffable appeal of these movable literary feasts—all these are reasons that support the inclusion of pop-up books in the classroom at ALL levels.

***Rose Reissman, Community School District #1, New York, New York***

## Students Stage Shakespeare

This idea is largely based on the Folger Library publication *Shakespeare Set Free* and is one of the most successful activities that I have ever used with the study of Shakespeare. I use this activity during class study of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Using the promptbook activity, the students, in a large group format, discuss the staging of several scenes, including the balcony scene. The main goal is help students see that stage directions are actually embedded in the lines, making the scene easy to visualize.

By the time we are ready for Act III, the students are ready to get into small groups and decide on the staging of the duel scene. I run off promptbook-style copies of the text, and they get to work. As I circulate around the room, I hear my students get very involved in the language of Shakespeare, discussing and getting real meaning from the printed page.

Then we compare the versions of the various groups by having each group perform the scene. Following that, we compare their versions to several screen versions of the same scene. Most students see that there are several ways to handle the stage directions. Most importantly, however, they realize that they can understand Shakespeare, and most of them lose the sense of intimidation that they bring to a study of the Bard.

A second activity that works well is to have every student create a poster of a famous Shakespearean quote. We hang these in the hall, and I am rewarded by hearing all the students in the school quoting Shakespeare as they read the posters.

***Emily Moorer, Clinton, Mississippi***

# Focus on Poetry

## Odes of Joy

There's something about an ode that tends to immediately put a distance between this older style of poetry and twentieth-century high school students. And, to be truthful, I have always felt a bit ominous about the onerous ode. Yet every year like clockwork I steadfastly teach John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the chorus's odes from *Oedipus* to my senior English students.

For me, the task is not all that excruciating, as I happen to enjoy teaching both pieces of literature, but finally this year in a moment of educational honesty, I realized that the experience was not the most enjoyable or worthwhile for my students. What to do?

What follows are two lesson plans that were a result of this pedagogical epiphany and soul-searching. These lessons became two quite successful and rewarding days in the classroom and I will continue to use them—and hopefully, improve them—in the future.

### *John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"*

I always begin this poem with a journal topic or lead-in quick writing assignment that asks the question: "Do you ever talk to inanimate objects?"

After a brief clarification of just what constitutes an inanimate object, my students respond in writing for about 10 minutes. This is followed by what is usually a stimulating and entertaining discussion as we all admit our tendencies in this area. Students talk to telephones, cars, computers, stuffed animals, surfboards, etc. Once we have established that this behavior is not that unusual we proceed to our first reading of Keats's ode.

*Students learn something about themselves, the other students in my classes, and even about the literary style of the ode.*

After having the students read through it once on their own, I then read it aloud to the class. At this point, I put the students into groups of three to four, providing each group with a butcher paper copy of a large urn (about 18" tall) which I have had student aides previously trace and cut out. I have two different styles of urns in several different colors.

The group's job is to use the description of the two sides of the urn in the ode to accurately decorate both sides of their paper urn. I give them 20 minutes or so to do this, providing them with markers, colored pencils, etc. Then each group presents their finished urns to the rest of the class with explanations. Along the way, I continually bring them back to the text to defend their urns' decorations.

Once this activity has been completed, I feel that the students have a solid idea of what is included in the scenes on Keats's urn. This being established, we go on to a more analytical discussion of truth, beauty and a "perfect" moment frozen in time, all concepts discussed in the original ode.

The students' final assignment is to compose their own odes, addressed to an inanimate object, of course, and following Keats's organization, style, and structure. These eventually go up on my bulletin board. Consequently, the students learn something about themselves, the other students in my classes, and even about the literary style of the ode.

*Tips*

### Poetry Collections for a Deserted Island: Five Picks

With so many excellent anthologies available and budgets often stretched, here are five I would give to a young adult (or buy for a school) on a deserted island:

*I Feel a Little Jumpy around You* (Simon and Schuster, 1996)

*The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (W.W. Norton, 1998)

*The Oxford Book of Comic Verse* (Oxford University Press, 1994)

*Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle* (Scott, Foreman, 1995)

*Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary American Multicultural Poetry* (Penguin, 1995)

And since the island is deserted. . . perhaps a sixth:

*Pierced by a Ray of Sun: Poems about the Times We Feel Alone* (HarperCollins, 1995).

***—from Albert Somers' Teaching Poetry in High School (NCTE, 1999)***

### OEDIPUS AND THE GREEK ODE

By the time we get to ancient Thebes and *OEDIPUS*, my seniors know what an ode is, in the more conventional sense, at least. But I've always found the chorus's odes unnecessarily long and often tedious (blasphemy, I know!). Of course, we go over the functions of the Greek chorus but until this year, I basically viewed the chorus as simply a part to get through so we could get back to the basic plot.

In trying to find a modern equivalent to the ancient Greek chorus, the only idea I could come up with was film, but very seldom do actors/actresses in the movies speak directly to the audience or comment as a body to someone else in the film. Brainstorming one day with my student teacher, we realized that the Antonio Banderas role of Che Guevara in *Evita* was a perfect example of a modern use of the Greek ode.

Now when we read *OEDIPUS* and after I have discussed the numerous functions of the Greek chorus and odes, I play about a 10-minute clip from the first part of *Evita*, when the Banderas character sings "Oh What a Circus!" You can get the lyrics off the internet; I make copies for the students so they can follow along. I also explain briefly who Eva Peron was and the impact she had on Argentina.

Afterward, we discuss what information the song provides us with and what are the Banderas' character's feelings about the dead Evita Peron. Finally, we draw some parallels between the functions of the song in the movie and the functions of the Greek chorus in *OEDIPUS*.

As a conclusion to the *OEDIPUS* unit, I usually give a take-home test. Part of the exam is to select a movie, current or otherwise, and provide a short summary of the plot. Then the students are to write at least a 30-line choral ode that could be interjected into a specific scene in the film; this particular scene is also to have been highlighted in their summary. They are to incorporate into their ode as many of the functions of the Greek ode as possible, keeping the style the same. Once students have to actually write odes themselves, they very quickly gain at least an appreciation of them and hopefully, a better understanding.

***Mary Ann Paul, Coast Union High School, Cambria, California***

## Silhouette Poems

When planning for the first week of school, I search for activities that engage students, serve as icebreakers, help students see themselves as valued members of the class, and demonstrate their writing abilities.

This year I based my opening activity on Mark Twain's quotation, "Everyone is a moon and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody."

On the first day of class students interpreted the meaning of the quotation and speculated on the reasons for the differences between private and public faces, as preparation for the silhouette poem assignment which would creatively reflect their "light" and "dark" sides. Next, they were given the following silhouette poem assignment guidelines:

- Think about the quotation and about your public and private faces. Create two short poems, one that reveals your public self, and another that reveals your private self. You can use the same poetic form for both selfs or a different one for each self. The poems can be freestyle, or you can use forms such as acrostic poems, ABC poems, cinquains, diamantes, wingsparks, or list poems. (I provided descriptions and examples of each of these types of poems.)

- In class you will be given one black and one white 12 x 18 inch sheet of construction paper. You and a partner will trace each other's life-sized profiles. After cutting a black

Tips

## Learning to Revise

Most student writings are egregiously flawed because students, never having been taught, do not know how to revise their work. Revision, for most students, is nothing more than tedious recopying, the penalty exacted for incorrect spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Revision, in this sense, yields little or no real improvement in their writing. . . .

As Peter Elbow points out in *WRITING WITH POWER*, revision is most easily learned by working on someone else's writing. Free of the writer's preconceptions and biases for the poem, the reviser has an easier time making changes in the poem. That is, revising other people's work nurtures in the reviser the cold calculation necessary when reseeing, judging, and recasting their own work.

***—from TEACHING POETRY WRITING TO ADOLESCENTS (NCTE, 1998) by Joseph Tsujimoto.***

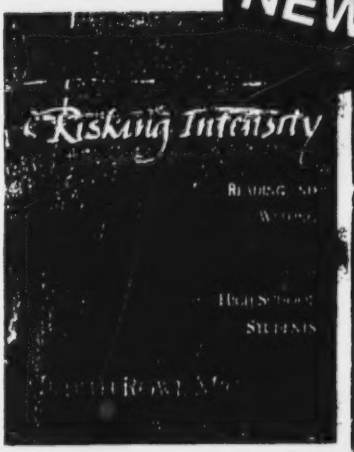
**Visit www.ncte.org/notesplus to read an excerpt from TEACHING POETRY WRITING TO ADOLESCENTS or to order this book.**

# New Poetry Resources *from NCTE!!!*

Click on Poetry Page from the *Notes Plus* Web page (www.ncte.org/notesplus) for excerpts from these great new books!

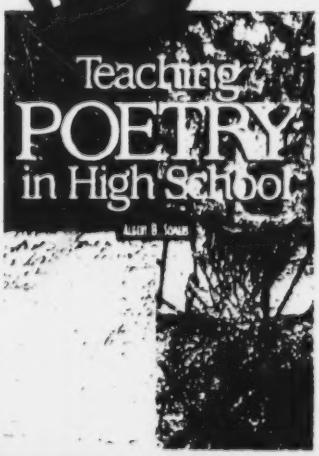
NEW!

**Risking Intensity**
**Reading and Writing Poetry with High School Students**
Foreword by Maxine Greene
Judith Michaels




*Risking Intensity* is a book about drawing on the self to study poetry, to write it, and to share it. Judith Michaels approaches the subject at both the personal and practical levels, opening the world of poetry to her classes through carefully planned strategies. Poems by students and teacher illustrate each topic. We also hear the cadences of published poets—of Keats, Wordsworth, Clifton, Thomas, Komunyakaa, Basho, and others. *188 pp. 1999. Grades 9–12. ISBN 0-8141-4171-4.*
**No. 41714-3125** **$15.95 ($11.95)**

NEW!




Teaching Poetry in High School
Alfred B. Somers

If you were teaching poetry in high school, which poems would you select? Those you studied in first-year English because they were "classics"? Would you teach form and technique? What about rap? Alfred Somers answers these and other questions, offering the teacher a vast compendium of resources in a highly accessible format. The book also offers:

- over 40 complete poems
- a discussion of assessment issues
- poetry across the curriculum
- poetry on the Internet

A comprehensive resource for teachers, this book presents practical ideas and myriad ways for teachers and students to discover the joys of poetry. *234 pages. 1999. Grades 9–12. ISBN 0-8141-5289-9.*
**No. 52899-3125** **$19.95 ($14.95)**

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silhouette and a white one, glue the two silhouettes together, aligning the profiles.

- Write the poem about your private self on the black silhouette, and the poem about your public self on the white one. Decorate your silhouettes with photographs, memorabilia, objects, drawings, or anything you think will reflect your two sides, but don't obstruct the outer edges, so your profile is easily visible.
- Try to use vivid, descriptive, original language that captures the essence of your public and your private selves.
- On the due date, you will share the poem of your choice with the class to help your classmates get to know you better.
- Your silhouette will hang from the ceiling for the rest of the school year because you are a valued member of this class. We'll take them down the last day of class to bring closure to the school year.

Once the students understood the criteria for the assignment, I distributed the black and white construction paper, and had them alternate tracing profiles with their partners. I borrowed several overhead projectors from colleagues to shadow students' silhouettes onto the paper for tracing. Students enjoyed tracing, cutting, and commenting on finished profiles.

On the due date, two days later, students shared their chosen poems. Most, of course, felt more secure reading their public self poem. But, surprisingly, some elected to read their private self poems, and several even chose to read both poems to give a more complete representation of themselves. The poems and decorations often generated responses of awe, respect, and curiosity from the audience.

Once all the poems were read, students looped a 12-inch length of fish line through the top of their silhouettes, attached a paper clip to the fish line, and hung their silhouettes from the ceiling by sliding the paper clip between the supporting metal rails and the ceiling tiles.

Parents were challenged to find their children's silhouettes on the ceiling during back-to-school night, and were very impressed with the students' creativity. More than a semester later, students still comment favorably on this project, and even accuse me of hanging new silhouettes as they discover ones they hadn't previously noticed.

The silhouette poem assignment has been one of my

## Poetry on the Web

I love sending my students to these two places:

http://www.killdevilhill.com

http://jollyroger.com

They are simply the hippest places on the web for Gen X and poetry. They call themselves Grungeservative and have bon mots like "Sailing the seven cyber-seas, pirating buried great thoughts" all over the place.

Let me let Becket Knottingham of Kill Devil Hill speak for himself. Here's a clipping from the Kill Devil Hill Charter:

> "For out upon the ocean, in my mind's eye, I perceived a three-masted frigate. Her cargo was the poetry of the Great Books, and she was sailing through a treacherous era which was fast becoming a graveyard for the Western intellect. And in the stark silence that is the hallmark of Christmas Eve, I discerned the forgotten Truth's call of distress.
>
> And he who hears that beckoning voice finds he must respond. He must voyage out against the pounding surf of the popular press's opinion, against the raging wind of the bureaucracy's judgment, and pen the contemporary living Truth so as to ensure the continuity of souls."

The site, according to its owner, is dedicated to the Generation-X Renaissance. It's written by young adults for young adults.

As for Jolly Roger, it's just an all-around cool site. Classical rhythms and rhymes abound, and it's completely nautical, which is a big draw for me!

There's both original and classical poetry on both sites. I highly recommend these sites for students, teachers, and all lovers of poetry.

***Del Hughes***
***Clackanaw@aol.com***

I just found a wonderful set of thirty lessons in poetry writing at http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/9699/poetry/

***Karen McGill***
***WAKEUPMAN@aol.com***

I have some poetry links gathered at http://personal.kwom.com/Kafkaz/englishweb/poetry.htm. Many of those links will lead you to still more.

***Kathy Fitch***
***Kafkaz@kwom.com***

most effective opening assignments for a new school year because of the students' positive response to the assignment, the thoughtful reflection in the poems, the quality of the writing, the sensitivity shown to peers during the readings, and the revelations about character. The assignment quickly established a supportive, working environment and gave me a snapshot of my students' writing capabilities.

**JoAnn Livermore, Eagle High School, Eagle, Idaho**

*Tips*

## Teaching Poetry on a Shoestring

Given the direst of economic circumstances, is it possible to teach poetry well on a limited budget? Yes, if a teacher is creative and resourceful. Here are some ways:

Have the English department make a one-time purchase of a single class set of a modern poetry anthology to be used by multiple teachers in multiple classes year after year. Thirty copies of a hardbound collection like *I FEEL A LITTLE JUMPY AROUND YOU* would run about $400, or $40 a year over a decade's use.

Limit the number of poems you teach the entire class. If you fully discuss, say, five poems in a unit, you could probably squeeze all of them onto one or two transparencies for use with an overhead projector for a total cost of $0.25 or $0.50. And using five *new* poems each year would address even the strictest of copyright law interpretations.

If you felt each student should have a copy of each poem in hand, the cost would jump to something like $6.00, still doable. This would involve making thirty copies of each poem for a total of 150 sheets, which at $0.04/copy would run $6.00. If some of the five poems are already in the textbook, the cost would be even less. The teacher would hand out the poems in a given class and take them back. And again, costs could be cut by combining several poems on a single sheet.

***—from Albert Somers' TEACHING POETRY IN HIGH SCHOOL, (NCTE, 1999)***

## Building Creative Characters

Every year by the second semester of my sophomore American literature survey course, I realize my students have become almost too mechanical in their literary analysis and are in need of some creative exercises.

This year I tried two new writing activities that were quite successful. We were just starting to study the modernistic movement in poetry, beginning with Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. After we read Pound's "The Garden," the class began discussing the woman that the narrator describes. Who is she? Where does she come from? Pound certainly gives a hint at her background, but leaves the rest of her history to the reader's imagination.

I asked the students to write in their journals several questions they would like answered about the woman. I asked for a student volunteer and began the exercise asking, "What is the name of the woman in the garden?"

The student answered the question and then proceeded to ask another student one of his questions (Is she married? Other questions asked and answered included: "Does she have any family?" and "What is her favorite novel?") Everyone had a chance to answer and ask a question. This exercise gives students a chance to think creatively and encourages total class participation.

Another creative activity I tried—recreating the old television show "This Is Your Life"—can be applied to a variety of main characters from poems or stories. My class tried this with T. S. Eliot's "J. Alfred Prufrock."

We divided into groups, assigning roles such as mother, best friend from high school, a present-day acquaintance, and the girl Prufrock never approached at the party. Each group spent 15 minutes writing up a creative narrative sharing a moment from Prufrock's life. A volunteer from each group took on the role for the actual program. One additional group was in charge of setting up the show and designing a brief script for the program. One person from this group volunteered to be the host and another, Prufrock.

After the narratives were complete, we pulled the overhead screen down in the front of the classroom, and the host set out chairs for the guests. Then, the "show" began. "This is your life—J. Alfred Prufrock."

After a brief introduction of Prufrock, the host proceeded to call mystery guests behind the screen. Each took turns dramatically reading their creative narrative, and then allowing Prufrock to "guess" who they were. Our Prufrock made up names after each narrative, adding to the hilarity of the situations.

Here's a sample narrative:

> Mystery guest: I remember Mr. Prufrock. Although I only saw him at one social gathering, I will never forget him

because he was the one man I couldn't attract. I was discussing art with some of my friends when I noticed this gentleman across the room staring at me. I returned a look of invitation, hoping he might come over and offer me a drink. He wasn't "drop-dead" handsome, but he had some striking features and a decent body. Well, anyway, I could tell he was shy, which I kind of go for in men, so I decided to stroll over to him. As I headed in his direction, he started looking frantically around the room and then bolted for the door. I asked around the party to find out who he was, but nobody seemed to know. Finally, the host mentioned he was his cousin and told me his name—Joseph Alfred Prufrock. I called a few times, but he never returned my calls . . ."

Prufrock: "Is that you, Sheila, the girl I never approached because I was too insecure?"

On an impromptu, the alleged "Sheila" piped up from behind the screen, "What? You mean you were checking her out too? Well, this is Jessica, the dark-haired knockout that you were too timid to speak to and it looks like you've blown it again!" (Jessica stormed off "stage" and the audience laughed heartily.)

The class was the perfect studio audience, clapping and

# TEACHER TALK

## Tone and Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz"

I read "My Papa's Waltz" aloud two different ways to my students. After they picked their chins up off the floor, they wanted to know how I did that.

Did what? One tone made it sound happy and fun and one tone made it sound like one of the worst forms of hell. *Finally* they understood how the poem could be interpreted two ways.

Actually, I have been studying this poem for years. The first 5 years I read it, I thought only that daddy had a few too many and finished celebrating boisterously at home with his child by dancing across the kitchen floor. After the first 5 years, the nation began to focus more and more on child abuse and more and more interpreters began to see it as a terrible experience for the boy. It's interesting that as our nationwide perspective changes, our interpretations also change.

Personally? I think the kid was having a blast dancing with Daddy.

***Sherry Godsey***
***sgodsey@usit.net***

I think "My Papa's Waltz" is the *best* poem to use to teach tone and to show that something complex can contain more than one tone. I credit these thoughts to my XJ Kennedy poetry book and to a Jane Schaffer unit called "Style Analysis."

The XJ Kennedy book is *AN INTRODUCTION TO POETRY*, 8th Edition, edited by XJ Kennedy and Dana Gioia. On page 16, the book presents the poem "My Papa's Waltz" and then discusses the tone of the poem.

The style analysis unit is particularly helpful. Schaffer always says that complex works have at least two tones. I feel that "My Papa's Waltz" is a perfect example to use to present this idea because the two tones can so obviously be seen. When I first present the "two tones" idea, I always go back and tell the students to remember "My Papa's Waltz," which we've already studied and discussed.

***Susan Grandfield***
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The poem "My Papa's Waltz" always intrigued me, so I did some research. According to Robert DiYanni, "The dance is somewhat rough because the boy's father has been drinking . . . The boy is described as 'clinging' to his father's shirt, but the language doesn't clarify whether that clinging is purely out of terror—or whether it is part of the game father and son enjoy together. Presumably this bedtime romp is a regular ritual rather than a one-time occurrence."

I found an article that quoted Roethke as saying that the poem is ambiguous on purpose, showing a blend of fond and not-so-fond memories adults often have of their childhoods. No matter how difficult or abusive the parent might have been, the adult child still remembers the good times to offset memories of the bad.

I think that is what the persona in this poem is doing. He uses the affectionate word for father, *Papa;* he uses words such as *romp* and *waltz*. Yet he also uses words such as *death, battered, scraped,* and *beat*. Roethke admits using such diction to create ambiguity.

I read this poem to my students twice and have them jot down responses as I read; first, I read it with emphasis on the negative words; then, I read it again with a lighter tone and emphasis on the positive words. This is a good poem to use to teach that poetry isn't always black and white; there is room for interpretation, and sometimes that is exactly what the poet intends.

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gasping on cues. The narratives captured a lot of Prufrock's history and explained his insecurity with women and the root of his own self-esteem. Overall, they were humorous and clever.

These activities allow students to be creative and interact with the literature in refreshing ways. They can create backgrounds and personalities and offer writing that allows a break from expository essays.

***Cathy Bankston, Hawaii Baptist Academy, Honolulu, Hawaii***

Tips

## Poems as Picture Books

More and more often, poems show up as the text for beautifully illustrated picture books—another kind of connection between art and poetry. And while the genre has long been associated with young children, picture books are increasingly appropriate for young adults as well. Here are just a few:

*ARITHMETIC* by Carl Sandburg. Illustrated by Ted Rand.

*BIRCHES* by Robert Frost. Illustrated by Ed Young.

*CASEY AT THE BAT* by Ernest Thayer. Illustrated by Barry Moser.

*CASEY AT THE BAT* by Ernest Thayer. Illustrated by Wallace Tripp.

*THE CREMATION OF SAM McGEE* by Robert W. Service. Illustrated by Ted Harrison.

*THE HIGHWAYMAN* by Alfred Noyes. Illustrated by Charles Mikolaycak.

*THE HIGHWAYMAN* by Alfred Noyes. Illustrated by Neil Walkman.

*I LIVE IN MUSIC* by Ntozake Shange. Illustrated by Romare Bearden.

*IN A SPRING GARDEN* by Richard Lewis. Illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats. A collection of haiku.

*OX-CART MAN* by Donald Hall. Illustrated by Barbara Cooney.

*PAUL REVERE'S RIDE* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Illustrated by Ted Rand.

*STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING* by Robert Frost. Illustrated by Susan Jeffers.

***—from Albert Somers' TEACHING POETRY IN HIGH SCHOOL (NCTE, 1999).***

# FOCUS ON LITERATURE

## Noticing The Color Purple: Personalizing the Invisible

### *Introduction: Educating for Diversity*

This condensed excerpt is reprinted from *TEACHING FOR A TOLERANT WORLD* (NCTE, 1999), edited by Carol Danks and Leatrice B. Rabinsky, and the NCTE Committee on Teaching about Genocide and Intolerance.

"God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. God made it . . . [j]ust wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it." Thus, Shug tries to explain to Celie, in Alice Walker's novel *THE COLOR PURPLE* (1982), why their love for each other is not sinful. According to Shug, all of the diversity of creation is a gift from God that is to be noticed and appreciated and accepted.

Celebrating the diversity found in the United States has been a theme in American society for some time now. In a literate and multicultural society such as ours, books are powerful vehicles for conveying images of diversity. Largely due to the impact of multicultural education and multicultural literature, teachers today are "increasingly recognizing the role of . . . literature in shaping attitudes . . ." (Norton, "Language and Cognitive Development" 103).

Good multicultural literature is thought to provide both a mirror to validate a group's experiences and knowledge, and a window through which those experiences and knowledge can be viewed—and perhaps more important, understood—by "outsiders" (Cox and Galda).

It provides an invaluable opportunity for teachers and students to glimpse the lives of "the Other," to know for a time what it feels like to be a member of a group that is not in the mainstream. . . .

### *Overcoming Intolerance: Theory into Practice*

The theoretical value of literature as a means to sensitize readers to the Other may be a popular idea among educators, but what are the practical implications of the theory, especially when it is applied to dealing with a specific and often deeply ingrained prejudice such as homophobia?

In an article in the *JOURNAL OF READING*, Wayne Otto proposed the value of using a specific piece of literature to blend the theory into practice. In his article, Otto described a graduate level course on issues in reading education in

which he planned to include a discussion of teacher Roberta Hammett's (1992) attempts to incorporate gay and lesbian literature into the twelfth-grade curriculum. Although the class, according to Otto, had been very thoughtful and talkative about a variety of issues such as race, class, and gender stereotyping and censorship in classrooms, when it came to discussing the Hammett article, the class "suddenly fell—not entirely silent—[but] let's say *noticeably subdued*" (494).

Otto suggests that his usually talkative graduate students' reluctance to discuss the importance of addressing and combating homophobia might be attributed to their lack of understanding about homosexuality, and the belief of most of them that they did not know any lesbians or gays personally.

After the class, one of his students brought Otto a copy of Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind* (1982) and suggested he read it. Otto recognized, upon reading this "well told story of what happens when two teenage girls . . . begin to realize that they have feelings of love for each other" (494) that talking about an issue is not sufficient: Educating people about and sensitizing them to their prejudices and intolerance must involve giving the Other a face. In the perceived absence of real faces, Otto believes that a piece of literature can supply a "true and accurate picture" of those people and their experiences about which we think we have no knowledge. . . .

## For Info on the Gay/Lesbian/Straight Educators Network

Teachers who are interested in supporting the gay/lesbian/bisexual students in our classrooms can do so by joining an organization called GLSEN—the Gay/Lesbian/Straight Educators Network.

You do not have to be a gay teacher to be involved. In fact, straight teachers are often the biggest advocates for gay students (and teachers) because they are not as vulnerable to backlash. If you are interested in beginning a Gay/Straight Alliance in your school, GLSEN can help you with all aspects, including legal issues surrounding building use, privacy issues and others. Visit the GLSEN Web site at http://www.glstn.org.

If you're interested in helping to support gay youth, another site to check out is http://www.danwoog.com. It is imperative that we protect and support this silent minority. Too often we teach with an atmosphere of heterosexism; we assume that all of our students are heterosexual. By doing so, we privilege one group over another and quietly (and usually unknowingly) silence our gay/lesbian/bi students simply by ignoring them. Hopefully this discussion will prompt more teachers to create safe environments for these kids.

***—Contributed to NCTE-talk***

## Discussion Starter: *Am I Blue?*

*Am I Blue?* (HarperCollins, 1994) is a wonderful collection of stories that should be enlightening for all adolescents. I especially like the title story "Am I Blue?" Although I was nervous about introducing a "gay" story to my summer school kids (I aimed for diversity this summer), they responded quite enthusiastically to it. It is very entertaining and not at all heavy-handed.

In it, a boy who has been getting picked on because some other kids think he's gay (he's not sure himself), is rescued by a "fairy god-father" who grants him "gay fantasy number three" where everyone in the country who is gay (or had a gay experience) turns various shades of blue.

It led to some really wonderful discussion in that class. I'm planning on using it with my American Lit class next year as a companion piece to *The Scarlet Letter* to talk about advantages and disadvantages to both society and the individual of making a person's past actions, religion, sexual preference, etc., public knowledge (in the form of scarlett letters, yellow stars, or blue skin). . . .

***—Contributed to NCTE-talk***

## *Theory into Practice in an American Literature Class*

### Background

Confronting deeply ingrained prejudices of any kind can be difficult for teachers, and confronting homophobia, the most "acceptable" prejudice, in one of the most homophobic institutions takes a great deal of determination and courage.

The remainder of this article describes the way in which Chris, a public high school English teacher in Columbus, Ohio, actually practices Otto's suggestion, using literature to personalize homosexuality, to give gays and lesbians "a face," and to help students understand the injustices that go unaddressed because of homophobia.

The class consisted of thirty-five eleventh graders enrolled in a required American Literature course. It reflected the makeup of the urban school, an almost even mix of

white and black students from both low-income socioeconomic backgrounds and middle-class backgrounds. In addition, at least six of the students had personal knowledge about and experiences with lesbians, gays, or bisexuals.

Chris, an English/language arts teacher of fifteen years, sincerely believes that literature is a viable means by which she can help her students move beyond their narrow frames of reference and broaden their perspectives on and appreciation for all aspects of the human condition. . . .

In order to ensure that her students "hear" the voices of all Americans, especially those marginalized ones, Chris often departs from the prescribed curriculum, supplementing it with novels and short stories by and about those whose writing and experiences are rarely included in the canon.

Her overriding goal is to bring about "a heightened sensitivity to the needs of all people in American society" (Norton, *THROUGH CHILDREN'S EYES*, 502), and her eleventh-grade American Literature curriculum is truly representative of the variety of American life and culture.

Concerns about justice and equity are part of nearly every discussion, as are discussions about how a person's perspectives are affected by his or her experiences. "I have an agenda," she says, and my agenda is to help students have respect for all people, so that all people are treated fairly. We talk about Native Americans, slavery, what happened to the Asian Americans who worked to build the railroads, the Appalachians in the mines, the Japanese Americans in the internment camps. It is my agenda to make them think about others.

### *Choosing a Novel*

Alice Walker's *THE COLOR PURPLE* is Chris's choice for an American novel whose characters (Celie and Shug) allow her students to "know" two people whose lives are improved and enhanced by the experience of lesbian love and commitment.

By giving lesbianism a face through a piece of literature, Chris enables her students to discuss homosexuality and confront homophobia "safely" within the context of response and discussion. Because students get a glimpse of another perspective, they can talk about homosexuality and homophobia with more knowledge, understanding, and compassion than most of them had prior to reading this novel.

"It is a way to talk about homophobia, and," she notes, "teenagers are especially homophobic."

**Read the full text of this article on the *NOTES PLUS* Web page at www.ncte.org/notesplus.**

***Mari M. McLean and Christine M. Gibson, Columbus Public Schools, Columbus, Ohio***

# TEACHER TALK

## Discussion Starters on the Topic of Violence

Recent posts to child_lit [e-mail discussion group] recommended these two picture books for use in class discussions on the topic of violence:

1. *ONE FLICK OF A FINGER*, written by Mary Lobeicki and illustrated by Caldecott-winner David Diaz, was described as "a good 'kids and guns' discussion starter for all ages."

2. John Marsden (Australian author of YA novels *LETTERS FROM THE INSIDE*, *SO MUCH TO TELL YOU*, *TOMORROW WHEN THE WAR BEGAN*, etc.) has written *PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY*, with each wish illustrated by a different artist. The child_lit reviewer described it as "a wish for a different way of living for us all" that "would make a nice closure" for discussions of violence. Here's the last of three stanzas:

May the bombs rust away in the bunkers,
And the doomsday clock not be rewound,
May the solitary scientists, working,
Remember the holes in the ground.
May the knife remain in the holder,
May the bullet stay in the gun,
May those who live in the shadows
Be seen by those in the sun.

***—from PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY by John Marsden (Star Bright Books, 1998)***

***Gloria Pipkin***
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I don't know the second book, but I have used ONE FLICK OF A FINGER with great success in my high school classes as an "into" for discussions about violence. It's gorgeously illustrated by David Diaz and sends a very potent anti-gun message.

***Adrienne Rose***
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# TRACI'S LISTS OF TEN

*"Traci's Lists of Ten" are lists of thoughtful teaching tips created by Traci Gardner, a former English teacher and now Online Resources Manager for NCTE.*

*We'll be printing one of Traci's lists in each of this year's issues of Notes Plus; more lists will be made available on the Notes Plus Web page.*

## Ten Ways to Respond to Student Drafts

First, yes, I'll confess that I have used "cut and paste" to repeat the same sentence over and over when replying to papers online. This Ten includes things that I've tried to make responses more meaningful and supportive for writers than those cut and paste responses.

If you use one of these techniques, it's useful to talk with students about the responses you'll share so they'll be prepared for the feedback and to discuss ways to use your responses as they continue work on their papers. Since a number of the ways of responding differ from the standard end comments that students are used to, group discussion of how to use the feedback is especially important.

1. Have students write a reflective piece on the drafts that they are submitting and respond to their reflections in your comments, rather than to the draft itself. This is one of the old stand-bys. I ask students to tell me what their concerns and focal points are; I respond to their perceptions of the text. Since it's as important for writers to be able to read and think about their text as it is for them to do the actual writing, this technique works well—and it keeps me from telling them what I think about their text. Instead, we enter a conversation about THEIR perceptions of the text. If you've not tried this before, you might begin by asking students to include responses to three issues:
(a) What part of this draft is the strongest?
(b) What part of this draft will you work on next?
(c) Turn in 3 what-if's. Imagine at least 3 things that you might do to change this text: tell me what they are and why you're thinking of doing them. Begin your response with "What if"—for example, What if I cut the second paragraph completely?

2. Use a template that focuses on student-generated guidelines for the assignment. I have my students read examples of drafts written by students who have worked on a similar assignment in the past and/or professional examples in their books. They create criteria for the assignment, and we shape the criteria into a response template or checklist. The criteria might have broad categories such as "Readability, Clarity, Interest Level, and Organization" or "Ideas, Purpose, and Meaning." I focus my response on the areas that they have identified, referring to the guidelines and examples that they identified in class. Since the students own the guidelines used for the evaluation, I'm simply applying their criteria—not the insane eccentricities of an English teacher.

3. Use journalist's questions to structure a response—not all of my examples are questions, strictly speaking, but they provide a nice paradigm for moving through feedback to a draft. I modify the questions as appropriate for the draft and assignment. For instance, the "when" question below would work best for a draft that is close to completion. If I were working with an earlier draft, I change the question to something such as "When I read the details in your draft, I . . . ." I like to use these as thinking questions, asking students to respond to me, entering a conversation about their text either online, in conferences, or in writer's journals. Generally, I use some version of the following questions. Sometimes all 6 are more than I have time or energy to do, so I choose 2 or 3 and use those for all the drafts I'm reading.

- Who is this draft written for? Who is the audience?
- What is this draft about? What is its purpose?
- Where do details and specifics stand out? Where does the text SHOW well?
- When I get to the end of the draft, I . . . ? [complete the sentence; explain. For example, "I wondered whether the hidden money would ever be found."]
- Why did you . . . ? It's an interesting choice/technique/etc. Why did you choose it?
- How would your draft change if you . . . ?

4. Respond to the draft from three different points of view. I like to use this technique when we've been talking about the different audiences for a piece and the ways that different readers respond to a text. Depending upon the subject of the draft, I might respond as another student, as an older student, as someone else who has read the same work (or seen the same work of art/movie)—or as someone who hasn't, and so on. I try to fit these points of view to the particular assignment. For instance, if the assignment is a letter to the editor of the local paper, I might respond as the editor of the paper, as a concerned citizen who is interested in the same issue, and as a citizen who didn't realize that there was a problem. Once I get two or three concrete responses written, I add one silly one. For instance, I might respond as Bart Simpson or a character in a story we've read recently. I try to use several different characters in each class for variety—especially since students enjoy sharing the silly responses with one another.

5. Write two paragraphs in response to a draft. In one, use you-language, and in the other, use I-language. In the "you" paragraph, echo things that you have read in the

paper, giving writers the chance to compare what a reader sees in the paper with their intentions. For example, I might write, "you seem to be sad that the playground has been torn down." I focus on what I see as the writer's intentions, goals, and strengths (not the weaknesses). In the "I" paragraph, I indicate my feelings about the text. For instance, I might write, "I was confused about the garden. It is mentioned several times, but I couldn't understand why it was important" or "I felt sad reading the details about the playground equipment piled in the trash heap."

6. Respond to a partial draft by outlining what you think will happen next and why. This kind of response works well early in the drafting process, especially with narrative papers or arguments. I generally write two short paragraphs. The first summarizes what happens in the text up to the end of the draft. The second guesses at least three things that I think might happen next. As is the case when I use three different points of view (see below), I include one silly response—something absurd or unlikely or humorous.

7. "Talk Less, Ask More." I attended a keynote by Alfie Kohn recently in Austin. Kohn urged us to "talk less and ask more"—rather than telling students what they have or haven't done correctly. Ask them how they feel about their text, why they have included the details that they have, what they want to try next. Ask them what concerns they have, and what they think can be done to address these concerns. These techniques work best when you respond online, in conference, or in a writer's journal, since you're asking students to share details about their writing.

8. Write a review of the draft. This technique works well after we've done an assignment where students have written a book review or a movie review or after we've considered reviews of a text, artwork, or film in class. In response to their papers, I write a short review of my own. This works especially well with narrative or creative assignments.

9. Work on the connection between reading comprehension and writing: respond with summary, implied main idea, logical conclusions. Demonstrate how reading comprehension techniques apply to reading rough drafts. Write a one-sentence summary of the draft, write a sentence identifying the draft's main idea, and write a sentence or two drawing conclusions about the text. Be sure that each is labeled clearly, and then talk about how to use the information (e.g., writers should think about whether the implied main idea you've identified fits the purpose they had for writing? You might ask them whether there is anything they might change to make the main idea clearer to readers.)

10. Use a Writer's Response Journal over the course of the term. It might be unfair to include this as technique. It's a way to create on-going conversations with writers. When I am working in a computer-based classroom, I can use e-mail to enter into extended conversations about writing. When that is not possible, I use a writer's response journal—students turn in a journal with their drafts. In the journal, they should give me details about their text, questions they want to ask, and so forth. I include my response to their draft in their journal rather than as an end comment on the paper. My response is likely to include questions for them—based on techniques like those above. As work progresses during the term, I encourage students to re-read their journals and note changes they see. Periodically, I read back over older entries as well. The interaction in the journal is much like that of e-mail messages or conferences, but it can be a stronger tool in the long-run because it collects all the comments in writing and in one linear space. When time constraints or the workload make journals impossible to use for the entire term, I use them for a major project or research paper.

# Focus on Literature

## Practice with Critical Analysis: Two Exercises

Writing the critical essay or critical research paper requires students to interpret literature, to understand critical commentary written by professionals, and to connect the work of literature to critical commentary in a sensible way. The following exercises can help students improve their ability to interpret literature and to use critical commentary meaningfully.

### *Writing Better Critical Commentary*

To begin the process of interpretation, I assigned students something I dubbed "Notes and Quotes" for Chapter 1 of *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Students were to: a) jot down quotations which they considered important in revealing the narrator's tone or in delineating character, and b) explain each quotation. The quality of students' comments revealed they needed practice in writing interpretations that both made sense and stuck to the point of the quotation.

As a result of this homework, I developed an exercise in Critical Commentary which presents the quotations students chose, their sometimes faulty interpretative comments, and my suggestions about how to improve their interpretations (see the sample handout based on my students' comments on page 22).

This exercise requires students to accurately identify the topic and speaker of the quotation; to give the meaning of specific elements of the quotation; and to go beyond paraphrase and literal meaning without going too far afield in their interpretation.

When they have revised the examples given on the handout sheet prepared by the teacher, students can write their improved critical commentaries on the board or read them aloud. We had a lively class discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of each interpretive comment. Most students found that they were able to accurately explain one aspect of a quotation, such as what the words revealed about a character's personality, but missed another aspect, such as the speaker's tone.

This exercise enabled the entire class to really "dig in" to specific elements of writing good critical commentary. Students found this exercise difficult, but quite useful. It can be adapted for any work of literature by taking examples from students' "Notes and Quotes" homework.

### *Working with Critical Analysis*

To give students practice in choosing critical commentary to illustrate a point they wish to make in a critical essay, I used this introductory exercise for *NATIVE SON* by Richard Wright. As preparatory homework, students had read "HOW BIGGER WAS BORN," the essay in which Wright explains how he came to write the novel and develop the character of Bigger.

Students worked on the handout (see page 23) in class. The handout presents three quotations I chose from Wright's essay, each of which explains an aspect of Bigger's personality. Students worked in pairs to find a passage in the novel which illustrated (or "matched") each idea quoted from Wright's essay. In order to do this, students had to understand Wright's explanation, which sometimes required going back to his essay to read the entire section from which the quotation was taken. Students shared their paired quotations aloud and the class discussed how the excerpt from the novel supported the idea from Wright's essay.

The second part of this exercise can be done as homework if class time is short. Students have to find both elements of the quoted pairing: three sentences from "HOW BIGGER WAS BORN" which they consider significant and three "matching" passages from the novel to illustrate each of the critical comments selected from Wright's essay. Again, we shared their choices in class and discussed how well the passage from the novel illustrated the idea from Wright's essay.

## Classroom Solutions

### Proofreading Strategies for the Punctilious

Tired of reading papers that look as if students never even checked for spelling, grammar, or usage mistakes?

Help students learn to really see their text with the following proofreading strategies.

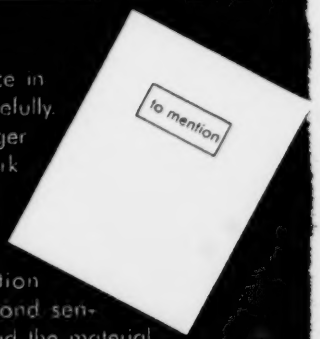
They're probably not the sort of thing you'll want to use every day, but they help students look differently at the text—instead of cruising over it without really seeing it, these techniques force students to slow way down and actually look at each word.

Even if you only use these tips once or twice, they can have a beneficial effect. And you might mention to students that they can come in handy when writing a cover letter for a job, a letter requesting a loan, or even a love letter—anytime they really need to make a good impression.

1) Read your writing backward, one word at a time.

2) Make a large cardboard square with a word-size hole in the center, and move it over the page one word at a time.

3) Read the first sentence in your piece of writing carefully. Place your left index finger over the punctuation mark that signals the end of that sentence. Next, put your right index finger on the punctuation mark that ends the second sentence. Then carefully read the material between your two fingers. Continue to place your fingers in the same way on each subsequent sentence until you have carefully examined every sentence in the piece of writing.




4) Exchange writings with a peer and perform any of these same same strategies.

***Nell Waldrop, T. H. Harris Middle School (Jefferson Parish Public Schools), Metaire, Louisiana***

# Writing Better Critical Commentary—Sample Handout

Below are some examples of critical commentary about *THE GREAT GATSBY* which could be improved. Write a better version of each selection.

1. "I had no sight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game." (6)

*Student's comment:* "He thinks that his cousin's husband will move them a lot because he wishes life were as rough and 'turbulent' as a football game."

To improve: Think more broadly! "Drifting on" = "moving" is only the literal level. In what other ways can people "drift"?

Revise: _____

2. "It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to rush out of the house . . . Something was making him [Tom] nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart." (21)

*Student's comment:* "We can see a little more of Nick's opinions and how he really feels about his cousin Daisy and her husband, Tom. We see that Nick really cares about his cousin Daisy but does not necessarily like Tom."

To improve: Be specific. What phrase tells you that Nick cares about Daisy? Interpret it directly. Do the same for the phrases about Tom. How do you know Nick doesn't like him?

Revise: _____

3. "'Time for this good girl to go to bed.'"

"' Jordan's going to play in the tournament tomorrow . . . over at Westchester.'" (19)

*Student's comment:* "She thinks highly of herself, maybe too highly."

To improve: First, note that someone else is speaking, not Jordan. Who is "she" ? In what way does this quotation indicate that she thinks highly of herself? Interpret specific words that show her conceit, OR choose a better quote to illustrate that idea.

Revise: _____

4. "I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe." (35)

*Student's comment:* "Daisy thought he (George) had more class but she found out he was below her."

To improve: Get the characters right! This isn't Daisy speaking. Also, this is a good paraphrase of the character's statement, but you should go further. When she says this about George, what does it tell us about her? (A comment should be more than a paraphrase.)

Revise: _____

5. "'I think it's cute,' said Mrs. Wilson enthusiastically. 'How much is it?'" (27)

*Student's comment:* "She loves dogs and the dog shows her emotions. She wants the dog to be around sombody. She is a very materialistic woman."

To improve: Look at the rest of Myrtle's behavior to determine whether her feelings are sincere. Second, does this quote (or the whole dialogue about the dog) really support the other comments made? Do not go too far afield when you interpret.

Revise: _____

6. "'He's so dumb he doesn't know he's alive.'" (26)

*Student's comment:* "This shows Wilson is completely oblivious to the fact that his wife is having an affair."

To improve: Yes, this comment is right about Wilson. But who says this? What does this comment show about the speaker?

Revise: _____

# Working with Critical Analysis—Handout Page

In critically analyzing a work of literature, we apply critical explanations or analyses to the work in order to show that the literature does what the critic, or writer, has explained. In the case of *NATIVE SON*, the author himself, Richard Wright, wrote an explanation of what he tried to accomplish in creating Bigger. His essay, "How Bigger Was Born," gives us a good place to begin applying literary analysis to a novel.

## Part I Directions:

For each quotation given below from "How Bigger Was Born," find a "matching" passage from the novel *NATIVE SON* which illustrates the idea quoted from Wright's essay.

## Example:

From "How Bigger Was Born": "the deep sense of exclusion . . . the feeling of looking at things with a painful and unwarrantable nakedness . . ." (518)

From *NATIVE SON*: "Every time I get to thinking about me being black and they being white, me being here and they being there, I feel like something awful's going to happen to me . . ." (21)

## Exercise:

1. From "How Bigger Was Born: "All Bigger Thomases, white and black, felt tense, afraid, nervous, hysterical and restless." (520)

From *NATIVE SON*:

2. From "How Bigger Was Born": "Bigger had all of this in him, dammed up, buried, implied . . . " (528)

From *NATIVE SON*:

3. From "How Bigger Was Born": "to show what oppression had done to Bigger's relationships with his own people, how it had split him from them . . ." (529)

From *NATIVE SON*:

## Part II Directions:

A) Find 3 more quotations from Wright's essay "How Bigger Was Born" which you consider significant.

B) Find a passage from the novel *NATIVE SON* to illustrate each quotation from Wright's essay. Give page numbers and be sure to copy accurately.

C) Explain in a sentence or two how the *NATIVE SON* passage illustrates the idea you quoted from Wright's essay.

The final part of the exercise asks students to explain, in writing, how each quotation from the novel expressed the idea from "How Bigger Was Born." Students must interpret each passage they selected in order to explain not only what the passage means, but also how it relates to Wright's ideas in "How Bigger Was Born." Again, students found these explanations hard to write, but recognized that they are the key to writing a clear, well-supported critical analysis of a work of literature.

Both of these exercises helped students write better interpretations of literature as well as to select critical commentary more carefully and use it more appropriately in their critical essays and research papers.

*Note: Page numbers are from the following editions:* THE GREAT GATSBY *(Collier Books, MacMillan Publishing Co., 1986);* NATIVE SON *(HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993).*

***Leslie Oster, Teaneck High School, Teaneck, New Jersey***

## FOCUS ON LITERATURE

# Using Themes in Literature to Help Students Cross the Barriers of Time and Culture

This condensed excerpt is reprinted from ROOTS AND BRANCHES: A RESOURCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE (NCTE, 1998) by Dorothea M. Susag.

*It is especially because of the primacy and the importance of stories that Native American literature is of such value to teachers and this book is such an important guide. The form of story is such that it draws the listener or the reader in. It creates interest. The purpose of the story is to communicate on a number of levels. To teach. That dual role of the story as entertainer and teacher has never been more needed in the classroom.*

—Joseph Bruchac, June 1998 (from the Foreword)

### *Theme: Remembering the Old Ways*

Central to all Native American cultures is *story.* Riding on the storyteller's breath, through image, word, and silence, is a vision—circling through the imagination and spirit of listeners to unite them all in "the old ways," a common experience of living value.

Central to the concept of story is the practical action of remembering, keeping in mind or remaining aware of the values most necessary for survival. According to Joseph Bruchac, in his introductory essay to NATIVE AMERICAN STORIES, the old ways, the "knowledge that native people obtained from thousands of years of living and seeking balance," was taught in "two very powerful ways. The first way was through experience, the second through oral tradition, especially through the telling of stories" (Bruchac 1991). . . .

Why should young people from differing cultures study the theme "Remembering the Old Ways"? Public schools today must prepare students to live in a technologically complex world where communication systems, labor force requirements, and family structures continually change. Today, many young adult Americans leave home to establish new values and new traditions, moving as often as every five years. Divorce is also more common today; according to one source, "the most widely cited recent estimates of future divorce risk are well over 50%" (Weiten and Lloyd 1994, 283).

As a result Americans of all ages—including over 70 percent of our students—stand to experience fragmentation, loneliness, and alienation from each other. Even ten years after a divorce, "children appeared to be even more vulnerable [than their parents], often harboring internal fears of betrayal and rejection that carried into their own intimate relationships in adolescence and early adulthood" (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1990,11).

Our earth also suffers from centuries of abuse, and the hope of a living and supportive environment for future generations is threatened. In response to the current situation, many traditional Native American people are saying that now is the time when the old ways are needed to restore harmony and balance within all creation. . . .

Along with traditional Native people, many scholars, political, economic, and religious leaders, and social scientists today are suggesting that despite our differences, we must realize our interdependent relationship to the rest of creation. The holistic, interdependent and cyclical, universal, and very personal world depicted in the following poem by Joy Harjo (Creek) is not a new idea—it is the old way of many Native American cultures.

**Remember**

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:

red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them, listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people are you.
Remember you are the universe and this universe is you.
Remember that all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember that language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

—Joy Harjo

Thanks to storytellers, writers, publishers, and teachers who have shared their gifts of story, Native and non-Native teachers and students today may also participate in this storytelling tradition and benefit from Native insights into human nature and the surrounding universe. In her book *Tonweya and the Eagles*, Rosebud Yellow Robe (Lakota) tells the growing-up experiences of her father, Chief Chauncey Yellow Robe. She includes a few of his favorite "age-old and well-loved stories, some frightening, some sad, some funny," as well as the following words of wisdom:

> People all over the world have their own way of life, but through their stories we find that we can understand them and live with them. Do not isolate yourselves, you will learn from others. (Yellow Robe 1992, 116)

Through the gift of Native American story, children and young adults today can learn to overcome fragmentation and alienation as they participate in the old ways. By reading these literatures and listening to traditional stories, they can learn to experience positive connections with others and to actively care about the relationships between themselves and their environments.

***The following lesson appears in Chapter 3 of Roots and Branches. Visit the Notes Plus Web page to read the full chapter, including additional suggested readings and activities.***

**Selection 1: *Runner in the Sun* by D'Arcy McNickle**

*Journal Activities (for each day's reading, approximately 20 pages per night)*

1. Each chapter has a title; explain how this title suits the chapter's subject, or sketch an event, character, landscape, or symbol from the chapter.
2. Note any incidents in which a character behaves responsibly or irresponsibly toward his or her community and define that behavior. How would you respond to that character and his or her actions?
3. Keep a page in your journal on which to record a list of all vocabulary words and their definitions; add any words to the list that are unfamiliar to you as you read.
4. Look for aspects of the precontact environment of the Pueblo Indians that resemble behaviors, beliefs, or traditions of your own culture.

*Postreading Activity*

In the role of Quail, write journal entries spanning one week, reporting all that you have learned about the beliefs and values shaping this culture. Include in your entries your observations regarding how these values dictate or motivate community behaviors.

*Questions for Further Consideration*

1. Research the etymology or the connotations and denotations of the word *salt*. Based on this research, how effective is the author's naming of his protagonist?

## Classroom Solutions

### Julius Caesar and Character Puppets

I needed a lighthearted introductory activity [to teach Julius Caesar]. So I bought brown paper lunch bags, sequins and bangles, buttons, coffee filters, yarn, and other odds and ends. Then I assigned each student a character and instructed the students to make a paper bag puppet of that character—an idea stolen from my son's first grade teacher. We had great fun making coffee filter togas, yarn wigs, bespangled soothsayers. I required that the puppets' names be printed on the front. To help the students keep the characters straight, I required that the conspirator puppets be given red hands. I strung a long piece of yard horizontally along one wall for the students to hang the puppets on.

Today I assigned small groups different sets of lines for them to put in their own words. Tomorrow, we will act out Act I using our puppets. Great fun!

***Kelly Gleason***
***Brainstormin@webtv.net***

2. How has Salt learned to balance his individual desires with the welfare of his people?
3. Because Flute Man and Dark Dealer desire personal power and advantage, they are feared. Think of someone you know with similar desires. Write an entry in your diary exploring reasons you might fear that person.
4. To what extent does this book contradict negative stereotypes of Native Americans? List five common stereotypes and then use specific events or personal characteristics that demonstrate the contradiction.

### *Transition Activity*

Watch the video *The Lakota: One Nation on the Plains*, produced by the University of Mid America, 1976–1978 and available through the Montana Committee for the Humanities. With N. Scott Momaday narrating, this video describes the movement of the Plains Indians across the Great Plains. It focuses on a case study of the Lakota, their migration into the region in the eighteenth century, and their adaptation to the new environment.

***—Dorothea M. Susag, Simms High School, Simms, Montana***

## Classroom Solutions

### Lesson Plans and Absent Students

My daily lesson plans are written with two audiences in mind: myself and absent students.

I keep all lesson plans in a three ring binder divided into sections for the different classes I teach. Students are instructed at the beginning of the year to pick up the binder from my desk when they return from an absence to consult the lessons and see what they missed. If they have questions, they may ask me before or after class or during a moment in class when I am available. They may also ask other students who were present to help explain assignments. The only lesson that is not in the binder is the current day's lesson which I place in the binder at the end of the day.

This has worked pretty well over the past few years. My lesson plan is still basically an outline. It usually does not contain all of my notes. However, if there are handouts that day, I will make note of it in the lesson and then the student will know that they need to pick up the handouts.

Handouts are kept in manila folders in another part of the classroom. Whenever there is an assignment, I try to write down enough specifics about it in the lesson plan that most questions [are unnecessary].

The few minutes of advanced preparation it takes to write all of this down saves enormous amounts of later explanation. Furthermore, I remember as a student being intimidated about asking teachers what I missed. The binder gives students the gist of what they need to know.

Often they will then go to another student for details. The problem with asking another student as the first source is that a kid will ask a friend, "What did we do yesterday in Williams's class?" to which the friend will reply, "Nuttin'" but if the student asks, "How did Mr. W. explain how to do this essay?" the other student will usually have something helpful to say.

When a student walks in after being absent in the early part of the year and asks, "Did I miss anything?" I give my usual sarcastic reply, "Nah, we were so despondent about your being gone that we just sat and stared at the walls!" Then, I merely hand them the binder and smile. After a few weeks, most kids have figured out the system and they will merely walk to the desk and pick up the binder without asking.

I also post all due dates on the wall or blackboard as reminders. Students who like to claim that they did not know that an assignment was due find they have few if any excuses.

Besides the binder and posting due dates, the next most important thing is training students to keep an academic planner or calendar upon which they write down assignments and due dates. Our school usually gives out a combined planner/student directory at the beginning of the year. I am very explicit at the beginning of the year that when an assignment is given, students must write it down in some kind of planner. Kids that write it down on a piece of paper that they shove in their back pocket are inevitably the kids that will be unprepared with the assignment later on.

In my experience, most student failure comes from lack of planning and organization than from lack of knowledge. We need to teach kids to be students as well as teach the content that we love.

***Lind Williams***
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# TEACHER TALK

## Book Burning and Censorship

*These messages are reprinted with permission from NCTE-talk, an e-mail discussion group for secondary teachers sponsored by NCTE.*

I'm planning a unit on censorship and book burning. I would like to use FAHRENHEIT 451 as a central book and especially focus on Bradbury's feelings towards censorship. In his note in the back of the book, he speaks of the many ways that we burn books, not just by flames, but even by subtle "editing" to remove objectionable content, etc.

Do you have any suggestions for further reading for the students on this topic?

***Greg Van Nest***
***gjvan@lamar.ColoState.EDU***

I taught Fahrenheit 451 last year during student teaching. Letting students see a list of banned books is usually very powerful, because there is usually at least one book on the list that most kids have read and liked. I had my students begin the unit by thinking about "freedom to read." (It happened to coincide with banned book month.) They did a freewrite about this topic and we went from there. We also had a interesting debate about banning books in general, in the context of the novel.

A good quote: "Censorship ends in logical completeness when nobody is allowed to read any books."
—George Bernard Shaw

***Constance L. Kelly***
***cokelly@mailbox.syr.edu***

Off the top of my head, I can't think of specific titles that deal with book burning/censorship, but I do know of an activity that has always generated good discussion.

When I teach TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD or OF MICE AND MEN, I bring in a list of books that have been banned, making sure that one of these books is on the list. As the students see what is on the list, they begin asking what could be objectionable about the various titles. We then branch off onto like areas about racial stereotypes and prejudices and freedom. It has always resulted in solid meaningful communication and thought.

A quick search resulted in the following Web sites:
http://www.cs.cmu.edu/People/spok/banned-books.html
http://ncac.org
http://www.ala.org/bbooks/challeng.html
http://www.aclu.org/issues/freespeech/bbwind.html

***Annie Jarvidson***
***annejarvidson@home.com***

Here are some YA books that deal with censorship:
THE DAY THEY CAME TO ARREST THE BOOK —Nat Hentoff (based on real-life challenge to Huck Finn, in New Trier, IL)
THE LAST SAFE PLACE ON EARTH —Richard Peck
THE NINTH ISSUE —Dallin Malmgren (Student press rights)
MEMOIRS OF A BOOKBAT—Kathryn Lasky

Lois Lowry's THE GIVER also works well in censorship studies, with its focus on trading freedom for sameness and the illusion of safety.

## September 25–October 2 Is Banned Books Week

*In 1998, when the Modern Library published its list of the 100 best novels of the 20th century, it sparked considerable debate over what is and isn't a great novel. The list also provides a vivid illustration of what Banned Books Week is all about.*

*Exactly a third of the titles on the list of "best" novels, including 6 of the top 10, have been removed or threatened with removal from bookstores, libraries, and schools at some point. THE GRAPES OF WRATH, number 10 on the list, has been one of the most vilified works since its publication in 1939. Other banned books in the Modern Library's "Top Ten" include THE GREAT GATSBY and BRAVE NEW WORLD. Today, it's hard to imagine a library or school curriculum without these works. Fortunately, few books are permanently banned from library and bookstore shelves in the United States. Why? Because librarians, booksellers, educators, parents, and others actively defend our right to read.*

***—from the ALA Web site at http://www.ala.org/books***

*The theme for this year's Banned Books Week, sponsored by the American Library Association and other groups, is "Free People Read Freely." For information on challenged and banned books, censorship, Notable First Amendment Cases, and resources, visit the ALA Web site at http://www.ala.org/bbooks/.*

This isn't directly related to book censorship, but this year is the 30th anniversary of *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the landmark case on student expression. There's lots of stuff on the web about it, and it's great for generating discussion on what kids are "allowed" to say, write, and wear at school.

At the Freedom Forum website, you'll find the Youth Guide to the First Amendment (http://www.freedomforum.org/FreedomForumTextonly/resources/hs_and_coll/Youth_Guide_to_1A.html), which includes background information about the First Amendment, summaries of key U.S. Supreme Court rulings, discussions of current controversial issues (including newspaper censorship, dress codes, school prayer, book banning, hate speech, "gangsta" rap, warning labels, and flag burning), suggestions for papers and projects, and pertinent quotes related to the First Amendment.

People for the American Way (www.pfaw.org) has its "Attacks on the Freedom to Learn Online," which gives details about recent challenges all over the country. Click on "Education" from the home page, and you should find it with no difficulty. These are good for creating scenarios to use with your kids.

***Gloria Pipkin***
***gpipkin@i-1.net***

***Note: Gloria Pipkin has more anti-censorship resources to share; anyone interested may contact her at the e-mail address above.***

## Censorship Problem?

NCTE offers advice, helpful documents, and other support at no cost to K–12 teachers, schools, and districts that are faced with challenges to literary works, films and videos, or teaching methods. Leave a message at 800-369-6283, ext. 3848, or call Charles Suhor, NCTE/SLATE Field Representative, directly at 334-280-4758.

You can also report a censorship incident via NCTE's Censorship Web site at www.ncte.org/censorship. In addition, this site offers an area to contribute links and citations related to censorship resources, as well as contribute to a planning forum to help develop the NCTE Censorship page further. With your help, this site can develop into a rich collection of online ideas, stories, and resources for teachers and others struggling with censorship issues.

### *Rationales for Books on Web Site*

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## Call for SLATE Starter Sheets

The SLATE Steering Committee invites submission of Starter Sheets on sociopolitical aspects of education. Samples of past topics have been tracking and grouping, the English Only movement, equal access to computers, and censorship.

SLATE Starter Sheets are intended as action-oriented information sources for English and language arts professionals.

The format for Starter Sheets should include, but is not limited to, the following: (1) presentation and background of the issue/topic; (2) general discussion, usually including NCTE positions; (3) recommendations for action or further examination; and (4) brief list of references and/or core resources. Starter Sheets manuscripts will undergo blind review by at least two outside referees who have expertise in the area.

Please submit four copies of the manuscript, typewritten and double-spaced, on 8 «" x 11" paper with one-inch margins. Use your name and affiliation on a title page only. Manuscripts should be between 2,000 and 4,000 words in length. Send manuscripts to: Lynn Carhart, Monmouth RHS, 1 Norman J. Field Way, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724-4005.


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# CLASSROOM NOTES *Plus*

A QUARTERLY OF TEACHING IDEAS OCTOBER 1992

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**Focusing on Writing—
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**Suggestions for Studying
Native American Literature**

**Ten Unusual Sources for Research Papers**

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## Call for Submissions

*NOTES PLUS* invites your descriptions of original, unpublished teaching practices for consideration. In the case of an adapted idea, we ask that you clearly identify any sources that deserve mention.

To make your description as useful as possible to *NOTES Plus* readers, we suggest that you consider questions like these as you prepare your submission: What are the goals of the activity or classroom practice? What makes it especially meaningful for you and your students? How do you introduce this idea to students? In what ways do their interests and ideas help direct the course of this activity? What natural progression does this activity usually follow? How are students encouraged to reflect on their learning? How do you judge this practice to be effective? How would you change your implementation of it in the future?

Please submit double-spaced, typed copy. Receipt of your submission will be acknowledged by postcard, but acknowledgment does not guarantee publication. We are unable to return manuscripts, so please keep a copy. We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

All *NOTES PLUS* submissions will be considered for the print version of *NOTES PLUS*, for inclusion on the *NOTES PLUS* Web page (www.ncte.org/notesplus), or for use in the annual edition of *IDEAS PLUS*.

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*Many of the e-mail contributions in this issue are reprinted from NCTE-talk, an electronic discussion group sponsored by NCTE. To read interesting discussions on a variety of topics related to secondary teaching, choose the NCTE-talk Archives from the NCTE Web page at www.ncte.org.*

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—Christa McAuliffe

*Watch for additional* **Tips** *throughout this issue!*

# IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Thank you to all the *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* readers who provided feedback on our new design. We're glad you like the changes.

After the liberal use of white type on a red background in the August issue, we did hear from more than one reader that, while they approve the snazzy format, the amount of reversed-out type was hard on the eyes. So we've toned down our act a bit—hope your eyes find it more restful.

Enjoy the teaching strategies and classroom advice in this issue. In addition to ideas that focus on *THE CALL OF THE WILD*, personal ethics, Shakespeare, self-evaluation, and family lore, we include suggestions for studying Native American literature, an excerpt from *NIKKI GIOVANNI IN THE CLASSROOM*, plus an interesting discussion on the teacher's role in the writing process.

As always, we welcome your feedback and teaching ideas. Please send e-mail to notesplus@ncte.org; send "snail mail" to *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS*, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

## Talking Back to Shakespeare

Like most teachers, I have students read Shakespearean text aloud in the classroom. The good readers quickly make themselves known, and it is a temptation to use them only. We all know what is otherwise inevitable—lines in monotone with mispronunciations, stumbling syllables, or misplaced pauses, and a listening experience for the rest of the class that is less than inspirational.

Happily, I have found that using *choral interpolating and echoing* is an excellent way to involve both good and mediocre readers.

**Step 1**: I assign roles to the good readers for the scene in focus, suggest tone or character moods, and ask them to go outside the classroom and generate an interpretive reading. I usually provide a salient prop or two—a lighted candle, sword, crown and scepter, silk scarf, etc.

**Step 2**: The remaining class members take pencils and mark their texts or receive pre-marked duplications of the same. The latter requires less time and still allows for additional changes to be marked in. I encourage students to suggest variations of tone; as we experiment, even the poor readers are doing basic elocution exercises and experiencing strong, communal rhythms. Self-consciousness vanishes.

I teach *Macbeth*, so here are abbreviated samples of a marked text of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene (V, 1):

*Gentlewoman*: . . . I have seen her rise from her bed . . . take forth a paper, fold it, write upon's, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep. (underlined phrase repeated slowly, rhythmically by interpolation group after the gentlewoman has spoken it)

*Doctor*. A great perturbation in nature. . . . what have you heard her say? (What has she said? 2x by group, one way with accent on "said," then on "has")

*Lady Macbeth*: Yet here's a spot. (repeat after Lady Macbeth, 3x, rising in intensity). . . . Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (2x by group, breathily, after Lady M. finishes question)

*Gentlewoman*: She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known. **(YES, HEAVEN KNOWS!** weightily, like a conscience)

*Doctor*: What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged. **(So sorely charged. Out, damn spot. Out, out, out!)**

**Step 3**: During the practice, the class may decide to break into smaller groups of light and deep voices for special effects of pitch and tone. For example, one class tried and liked the "Out, out, out!" with female voices only for the first *out*, male only for the second *out*, and all shouting the third *out* together. Sometimes we discover that a par- ▶

## Classroom Solutions

### Photo Leftovers

I take pictures all the time, and I always order two sets of pictures when I have my film developed. After sharing the second set I still have photos left, so I put the extras in a plastic box and take them to school. My students love getting to choose a picture to write about, and having visual stimuli helps them to create their stories. Even blurred seemingly useless pictures can be used in ingenious ways. One of our reading units is called Creative Imaginations, and my not-so-hot shots make great stimulators for short stories during this unit.

**Shirley France, Newby Memorial Elementary, Mooresville, Indiana**

ticular trio or quartet of mixed voices is the equivalent of sung harmony and desirable in a particular spot.

The teacher determines how much time to spend practicing. When the students with the major roles are called back into the classroom from their practice, the teacher can quickly have them mark any changes not on their text. It is important they know where interpolations and repetitions will be coming so they do not speak over them or fall out of character upon unexpected interruption.

**Step 4**: Now we have the performance of the class for themselves, the teacher, and whoever might be there as aide or observer. Critiquing afterwards can sometimes lead to a redoing of certain lines, time permitting.

The power of a chorus is strong, and it is enduring. What worked for the ancient Greeks still works today. Choral speech is the verbal equivalent of the bands, flag corps, and military marching units that please Americans in parades and attract young people to perform in them. Choral interpolation emphasizes meaning through the power of precise group uniformity.

Try it. I think you'll like this way of talking back to Shakespeare.

***Rosemary Laughlin, University Laboratory High School, Urbana, Illinois***

## A Musical Introduction to *Call of the Wild*

"If only you knew your school work as well as your music," my mother said countless times to me while I was growing up. Music was simply more important to me than anything else. My mother's words continued to echo in my head when I became a teacher. I realized that today's teenagers are no different than I was, listening to music day and night. Music, I thought, had to be the key to getting through to my students.

I've found innovative ways to incorporate music into various Language Arts lessons. I started by reflecting on issues and time periods of the various novels I teach and looking for music to help draw students into the lesson.

Whenever I teach a novel, I try to involve students in discussion of pertinent background information, such as the time period of the novel.

One required novel for our eighth-grade Language Arts course is *The Call of the Wild*. Since *The Call of the Wild* takes place during the 1896 Klondike Gold Rush, there is plenty of information readily available for classroom discussion. It would be easy to read excerpts from a history book to help my students understand the impact of the Gold Rush on society. Instead, I decided to use music.

When the introduction to the unit begins, I survey the students by asking who knows who the San Francisco 49ers are. The students laugh at such a ridiculous question and raise their hands. Next I ask what the name represents. Most of the football fans in the room know this answer. The team received its name from the California Gold Rush of 1849.

I then explain that there was a second Gold Rush in the Klondike region of Canada in 1896. I talk about the promise of wealth, adventure, and danger that the Gold Rush offered.

I ask students who would want to be a part of the Gold Rush? Who would go off on the adventure? And who would want a spouse to go off to find fortune? Most of the students raise their hands; they want the money and the adventure. But how dangerous might it be?

At this point, I play the song "Gold Rush Brides" with lyrics written by Natalie Merchant of the group *10,000 Maniacs*. This song is recorded on the *10,000 Maniacs* CD, *Our Time in Eden*. "Gold Rush Brides" contains a number of vivid ▶

## Look for more on the *Classroom Notes Plus* Web site!

We're working on providing more teaching ideas and related materials on the Classroom Notes Plus Web page. We thank you for your patience as we finetune this process. Among the new postings now available at www.ncte.org/notesplus are:

***Culture and Values***

This excerpt from Brooke Workman's Teaching the Sixties includes lessons and handouts to help students understand how values are formed, transmitted, and reinforced.

***Poetry Page***

*Tips and resources for teaching poetry to young adults*

***Teacher Talk***

*Classroom advice gleaned from the e-mail discussion group NCTE-talk*

***Literary History and Calendar Sites***

"This Day in Ancient History" and "Today in Black History" are two of the many interesting Web sites on this list compiled by Gloria Pipkin.

images in describing the women who were left behind by their husbands' "lust for gold." The song asks, "Who were the homestead wives? Who were the goldrush brides? Does anybody know?," and ends, "A widow staked her claim on a dollar and his name, so painfully. In letters mailed back home, her eastern sisters they would moan as they would read accounts of madness, childbirth, loneliness and grief."

I let the students listen to the song several times, focusing on both the lyrics and the rhythm. Once students feel ready to talk about the song, I ask them if their impression of the Gold Rush has changed. What kind of life was this? Were people getting rich? Where is the irony in the song? Why and how does the rhythm help the message of the song?

We discuss the answers to these questions and talk about why the Klondike region was so dangerous (e.g., frigid conditions, uninhabited land).

Students realize that the Gold Rush may not have been all that the legends promised. They point out parts of the lyrics that speak of loss of life ("a widow staked her claim"), of disease ("yellow fever lives"), poverty ("a family's house was bought and sold piece by piece"), and irony ("the land was free yet it cost their lives").

Most students take back their vote to be a part of the Gold Rush and question why people believed it was the path to riches.

As I listen to my students discuss the Gold Rush with understanding and emotion, I know that the song achieved more than any passage from a history book could have.

***Faith Wallace, Orange Avenue School, Cranford, New Jersey***

## History in Song

In my Net wanderings this morning I came across a neat Web site called History in Song:

http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/parton/2/history.html#top

It contains links to sites with songs pertaining to such categories as the American Revolution; 1800s: Immigration from Europe and the Westward Movement; the Civil War; World War I; the Labor Movement; the Depression and the New Deal; Race Relations and the Civil Rights Movement; 1960s: the Bomb Scare, the Generation Gap, the Vietnam War; and so on.

Individual songwriters represented include Bob Dylan, Sarah Ogan Gunning, Woody Guthrie, Aunt Molly Jackson, Phil Ochs, Buffy Sainte-Marie, and others.

**Portia McJunkin**
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## Reading and Writing about Ethics

In our self-involved world, it is important that we incorporate ethics into our teaching whenever possible. Encouraging students to strengthen their morals doesn't fall into any particular content area, but we all know it is a part of education that needs to be addressed.

For an English 12 elective course, Popular Literature, I spend three weeks with William Bennett's *The Book of Virtues*. This book is comprised of readings illuminating ten different virtues: honesty, self-discipline, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, faith, loyalty, and compassion.

In addition to reading excerpts from each of the virtue's chapters and keeping a response journal, students explore their own views on virtues, conduct research and write a paper about the morals of today's society, and examine their personal moral development.

### *Introduction to Unit*

I begin the unit by having students rank each of the virtues in order of importance. Students complete this task individually, and then take their list to a group of students where the group decides together how they want to rank the virtues.

Obviously, this is a difficult task for students since they define each of the virtues differently and rank them accordingly. Although this frustrates some students, it generates great discussion. This is one activity where I don't circulate to check "time on task"; students are completely engrossed in their discussions.

Groups write their list on a flip chart sheet and the lists are posted. I leave them up throughout the unit for reference, and they are also great conversation pieces for my other classes. We spend most of the first day discussing their lists, virtues in our society, and the intention of Bennett's book.

### *Reading and Reader's Response Journal*

I copy selections from each chapter which allows me to choose those poems, fables, myths, and excerpts most appropriate for my students. Each night, students read the excerpts from one virtue and write a response to each of the readings.

I provide a list of questions for students to ask themselves about each reading, and I suggest that they choose one or two questions to answer for each reading. The questions include reactions to the readings, connections to their own lives, connections to other literature, or observations about characterization, theme, or style. Students are encouraged to answer different questions for each reading. I tell them not to answer the same question more than two times for each day's reading. ▶

***Discussion Questions and Activities to Promote Self-Expression***

We begin each discussion with an in-depth analysis of the virtue—its definition, importance, and presence in our life. We discuss various facets of the readings including style, literary devices, themes, meter, historical context, connection to our lives, and connections to other titles we've read.

Students' journal responses are often the springboards for our conversations, but I also encourage self-expression by using other techniques such as small group discussions.

For example, when we discuss *loyalty*, I begin class with a new set of questions for students to answer in their response journal: Would you be willing to die defending your country? What would you do if one of your favorite teachers was fired without reason? What should Lancelot have done about his feelings for Guinevere? (We read *Idylls of the King* earlier in the year).

Students then discuss their answers in small groups, and I ask them to come up with a consensus answer that all group members can agree on. Rarely can a group agree on all answers, but they have very interesting debates as they try. If they can't agree, I ask students to explain to the class why they can't agree.

Another exercise which I use to give all students the opportunity to express themselves is the "card method." When we move our desks in a circle to facilitate a hearty discussion, I give each student three blank 3" x 5" cards. Each time students contribute to the discussion, they throw a card into the center of the circle. When they don't have any cards left, they can't say anything. All students must throw in all three cards. This discourages anyone from monopolizing the discussion and encourages all students to get involved.

***Research Paper—Taking the Moral Temperature of Our Contemporary World***

Shortly after we begin the unit, I assign a research paper where each student is given a moral dilemma. They are stated in the form of a question, and I collected most from the game Scruples®. For example, a student may choose a questions such as,

- Your friends fix you up on a blind date. When you enter the restaurant, you spot your date from across the room. You're appalled at his/her appearance. Do you go through with the date?
- Your friends are going away on vacation. They ask you to feed their cat each day. It has become a nuisance for you. Do you leave out large quantities of food and come every third or fourth day instead?
- Your teenage son confides in you that a friend of his is using drugs, and your son is worried about his friend. Do you keep your son's confidence, or tell the parents of his friend?

Students are required to pose their assigned dilemma to at least 25 people. In addition to getting an answer, they gather other data and compile it on a pre-made response sheet, as shown below. ▶

| |
|---|
| **Response #** |
| |
| Name Age Gender |
| Raised by whom? |
| Description of upbringing (strict, average, lenient, etc.) |
| |
| Answer to dilemma |
| |
| Rationale |
| |
| |
| |
| |

By gathering additional information about respondent's age, upbringing, and so on, students can make hypotheses about how each of these factors affected the respondent's answers. For example, did they find that women answered one way and men answered another? Did answers seem to be affected by age or upbringing? It is also important to get a rationale for each answer to truly understand responses.

We found that even though people may respond one way, the answer may be deceiving. For example, one student had the following question: If you met someone at a party and found the person very attractive, but dull or unintelligent, would you still date the person? Although an answer of "yes" appears superficial, the student who posed this dilemma found that most people who said yes said so because "you have to give everyone a chance. Some people come off dull or uninteresting at first, but you have to give everyone a chance beyond that first impression. Who knows, maybe he or she is just nervous."

It is extremely important to have students pose their dilemma to a variety of people, not just fellow students. I tell them to try to ask half males and half females. They should ask at least ten people over forty. The greater variety they have in the people they ask, the most interesting speculations they will be able to make about how people's answers may be affected by different factors.

After students have gathered their data, they bring it to class and I spend some time showing them ways to interpret their data. They create at least three graphs where they chart these factors. I show how this illustrates trends in their answers and strengthens their papers.

I explain that students' papers should state the dilemma, discuss the virtue(s) it addresses, and then analyze their responses and the trends.

The following quote is an excerpt from a student analysis. The question posed was, "You and your spouse are planning to separate. Your spouse develops an illness, becomes an invalid, and requires constant care. Do you still file for the separation and leave?"

"In the relationship between virtue and age, with an exception of forty-year-olds, the majority of people said no, they would not still file for separation. The data could mean a few things. One is that middle-aged people are less loyal, or more preoccupied with their needs and wants. Since the majority [of the respondents] said "no," the data could mean that today's society as a whole shows much loyalty and has a great sense of virtues toward the world.

In the relationship between upbringing and virtue, people raised by both parents generally said "no." Maybe being ▶

## Service Learning Web Site

Recently, I completed a Web page on service learning for K–12 teachers who would like a (very) basic introduction into the field. It contains links to funding issues, theory, ESL applications, and interviews with practicing teachers.

I hope you find it helpful. The address is www.wsu.edu/~noahb/slindex.html

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Tips

## Using Quotes in the Classroom

At the beginning of the year, I display laminated quotations from the required readings. Some of my past favorites include:

*"In spite of everything, I still believe people are good at heart."*
—Anne Frank

*"Our son shall open the books, and from him we shall know what is in the books."*
—Kino from *The Pearl*

*"Beware of Greeks bearing gifts."*
—Laocoön in *The Trojan War*

I also love jotting down humorous quotes on a corner of the blackboard for no reason other than amusement. Many of these come from the Internet. One favorite is "Eagles may soar, but weasels don't get sucked into jet engines." My favored epithet for non-homework-completers or loud complainers is "slacker weasel," so the kids and I are constantly on the lookout for weasel quotes.

The students like to bring in their own quotes, as well as comic strips, which we post in the hallway just outside the classroom door. The best one I received this year was the Dilbert Sunday strip where Dilbert is proofreading a colleague's technical report. He starts with, "Who wrote this, a trained squirrel? I'll first cross out the transparent lies and failed attempts at cuteness."

A great quote I got from a *Boston Globe* article on Matt Damon and Ben Affleck's high school drama teacher, Gerry Speca, is this: "Teachers are the mad ringmasters."

I forget where I read this, but I also like to remind the kids, "Life is a free circus. All you have to do is watch."

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raised in households with both parents provides a better atmosphere, and more values are learned from two parents. People who were raised "strictly" tended to say that yes, they would still leave. This could be seen as a strict upbringing tends to lead to rebellion or coldness. In the relationship between virtues and sex, twice as many males responded "no" as did females. From this data, it appears that males are more loyal to their spouses than females."

***Student Self-Reflection—Taking Our Own Moral Temperature***

As closure to the unit, students are assigned a self-reflection paper. They are told to start the thoughtful process by going back through their reader response journal and reading their responses. I give them a series of questions to consider for this assignment:

What virtue is your greatest strength?

When we began the unit, what virtue did you think was most important? Did you change your mind? If so, why did it change?

What virtue is your greatest weakness? What virtue do you most want to improve on? How can you do that?

What three readings from *The Book of Virtues* did you react most strongly to? Why?

What was your favorite/least favorite part of this unit and why?

What did you learn about yourself through the course of this unit?

What did you learn about the world you live in through this unit?

What characters or stories/novels/plays do you feel differently about now?

Not only is this a favorite unit for my students and me, the flexibility of this unit makes it easy to adjust for different groups of students or different educational objectives.

For example, students can each be assigned a virtue and give an oral presentation to the class. To focus on written expression, students can write their own original piece to add to a chapter. Students have a greater variety of experiences in these three weeks than in many of my longer units.

***Karin Hayes Callahan, Mechanicville High School, Mechanicville, New York***

# TEACHER TALK

## Teaching Voice in Writing

I'm a graduate student at the University of Washington, just about to start my student teaching at the middle school level. We've spent a great deal of time talking about voice and how/whether to teach it to students. (I know that some people refer to voice as style . . . I'm talking about the quality that gives a piece of writing a personality, whatever you choose to call it!)

I'm interested in hearing specific ideas that worked well in deepening students' understanding of voice.

Thanks very much,

***Tina Anima***
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My favorite voice lesson that seems to make an impression on students:

Ask the students to write down A) how a grandmother would ask someone to pass the potatoes, B) how a Harley Davidson motorcycle guy would ask someone to pass the potatoes, C) how a snotty 8th grader would ask for the potatoes, and D) how a rap artist would ask for the potatoes.

This can also provide an opening for a discussion about stereotypes.

I do a couple of writing invitations like this. Plus I ask students to write the lead to a story and to use a strong character's voice. I provide some examples of stories that use a strong voice.

***Nancy G. Patterson***
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One of my favorite methods is to sit down individually with a student, talk to him or her for a bit, walk through a rough draft they've recently written, find a "dead spot," you know, one of those places where the student is just blabbing on and saying very little, or at least saying it very unlike herself, and asking the student to talk to me about that part.

I usually ask her to say it "the way it is in her head, right now," and you'd be surprised how often she "says" it in "real voice" that has "real content" instead of in the previous dead voice. Sometimes this takes some prompting, sometimes even some dramatic prodding or role playing, but usually by the end of a session I've got the student understanding that "saying it the way it is in her head" is preferable to "sprucing it up to make it sound like I thought the teacher would like it."

I use this with seniors, in formal and informal essay writing.

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## Students as Storytellers

When I teach Greek and Roman mythology I often find that students have a hard time conceptualizing the oral literacy tradition. In these days of video and computer, many students have fallen out of the habit of *listening*. The beauty of storytelling as an art form is somewhat lessened or ignored.

So after my students have studied some myths, I ask them each to pick a myth to learn by heart. Instantly they're nervous, because they think they have to memorize it word for word. That's where the art of storytelling will need to be modeled by the teacher: a well-chosen anecdote told in a lively manner, with note cards handy, and with appropriate embellishments, pauses, and stresses to increase suspense, can serve as a helpful model.

I give students about a week to learn and practice the myth (on family or peers) and then we have a day of storytelling.

It is fun to immerse students in the culture of storytelling. If you are feeling a trifle corny, serving ambrosia and nectar can be fun. I have the students model a sheet as a toga over their clothes and we fashion laurel leaf wreathes for them to wear (fashion hint: at the local Dollar Store I found some inexpensive plastic vines that are easy to fashion into wreathes).

In the past, students have performed for just my class, but this year I found that other teachers in the school wanted to borrow my storytellers for their classes.

Of course, there are some students who are very shy about public speaking. In those cases, you can make arrangements accordingly. I usually find that once students are dressed the part and given a pseudonym (I alter their names to sound Greek), their shyness often disappears.

A good way for students to begin their myths is as follows:

> I am _____ of _____. I sing of _____ (Here students would mention the name of the god, goddess, hero, or mortal, using entertaining hyperbole by way of introduction.)

For example:

> I am Mikeicles of Athens. I sing of Aphrodite, the most beautiful of goddesses . . . (and then the myth would follow)

***Lynda M. Ware, Mt. Anthony Union Middle School, Bennington, Vermont***

## Classroom Solutions

### Sticky Problems?

Here's some advice for teachers who teach in classrooms with painted cement-block walls.

I live in a humid part of the U.S., and we have found that hot glue works best for adhering posters and student work (which we place on construction paper first) to this type of wall.

Strangely enough, the hot glue holds the articles on the wall for as long as you want, then just peels off whenever you want to remove it. No holes to patch up, no staples to remove.

This may be especially helpful to teachers who don't have bulletin board space available to them.

***Cindy Adams***
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## Poetry on the Web

Here are some useful web sites for poetry:

- Poet's World—resources for poets and on poets
http://www.execpc.com/~jon/
- Poetry.com—"the definitive source for poetry on the web"
http://www.poetry.com/
- The International Poetry Hall of Fame—a must see!
http://www.poets.com/
- Modern British Poetry—the full texts to many poems
http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/mbp/
- Looking for a certain poem or anything about poetry? You'll find it here.
http://personal.kwom.com/Kafkaz/englishweb/poetry.htm

***Connie Howell***
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## Keeping on Track with a Class Log

To help the students who have been absent and also to help me keep up with all of my classes, I established a system called the Log. It is also another way to help students take responsibility for what is being taught in class.

At the beginning of the school year, I start a log notebook for each class. To differentiate between classes, I use a different color for each notebook.

I have students in my classes sign up for Log duty in advance, working six weeks at a time. I distribute a blank spiral-bound notebook and each student signs his or her name at the top of one blank page. That page becomes the log sheet for one day. (If you prefer, student volunteers could be requested each Monday, or students could be assigned one week of log duty at a time.)

Each Monday I list on the chalkboard the names of the students responsible for each day that week. Each student is responsible for writing down all the class notes, homework, reminders, and other information given during that class on that day.

The students who have been absent can go to the notebook, look up the day they missed, and find all the information for that day. I even ask the students in charge of the logs to record the names of those who were absent on the log sheet. This is an excellent way to keep the classwork organized, and students like it because they feel a sense of importance while keeping the log. It helps teach good organizing and note taking skills, and I also use it to help me remember exactly what I did in each class.

Here's an example of the log sheet that I use:

**Day:** _____

**Date:** _____

**Absentees:** _____

- **Lesson for today:** [this includes any notes; discussion topics; book page numbers; whether homework was collected or checked]
- **Homework for today:** [verbal assignments; reading assignments; notes about any handouts or other materials distributed]
- **Reminders:** [notes about upcoming quizzes; tests; writing assignments; project deadlines; or announcements that were made
- **Recorder:** [name of the student filling out the log]

***Regenia Weakley, Ellis Middle School, Hendersonville, Tennessee***

# TEACHER TALK

## Teaching Kafka's *Metamorphosis*

I am going to have my sophomores in world literature read Franz Kafka's METAMORPHOSIS. Any suggestions?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk***

If possible, have them read one of the following as well:

"The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

"The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin

"Paul's Case" by Willa Cather

Each of these, like *Metamorphosis*, deals at some level with the emerging artist, the merging of reality with fantasy (or with the supernatural), and female self-awareness. Also, find a copy (overhead transparency if possible) of Edvard Munch's painting THE SCREAM, and a recording of the song "Once in a Lifetime" by the Talking Heads.

As sophomores, of course, students' grasp of some of these ideas will be limited to the extent that their own experiences are limited, but I do find that they connect with most of these ideas. I usually start a discussion (of any short story) with a question that sparks them to think about their own condition—in this case: "Sometimes, there are days when everything and everybody just sounds so stupid. Have you ever heard somebody say a word and it suddenly occurs to you that it seems that you've heard that word for the very first time, and you realize just how **dumb** it sounds? And suddenly you think you hate the person who said it? Days when your friends look like aliens? Or you're sitting in class thinking 'What am I doing here? Who **are** these people?'" (followed by the Talking Heads song and discussion, discussion, discussion . . . )

Next question: "In those moments, are you an artist? In other words, this sense of disconnection to the world around you—does it give you the urge to write, or paint, or do something to show the world how disconnected you are? Or how unaware of the truth (whatever that is) **they** seem to be?" (discussion, discussion, discussion . . . )

Then, THE SCREAM: "What is the bridge all about? The lines are straight, the creature (male? female?) is curvy . . . does he/she/it want to be straight? Or is it a case of wanting to get away from all that straightness? Is the creature an artist? Is he/she/it lost in the art, i.e., in the painting itself? Is "Once in a Lifetime" a scream? Is (whatever other story you read) a scream? (discussion, discussion, discussion . . . ) Now students should be ready for a look at "THE METAMORPHOSIS."

***Kevin Collins***
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# Classroom Solutions

## How Do I Prepare for a Substitute Teacher?

I have had some unique experiences as a student teacher and a substitute teacher which have equipped me with preparation tips for classroom teachers.

Set the standards at the beginning of the school year for how you expect your students to behave for anyone entering your classroom at the beginning of the school year. Your classroom culture should include respect for your standards even when you are not there.

- Make a note of the students who are genuinely helpful. It is comforting to know that there are students whom you can count on in unique circumstances. Pass this information on to a substitute. He/she needs someone that they can count on in unique circumstances.
- Make a note of established routines. A syllabus is essential for indefinite situations, but what about the hidden curriculum in your classroom?

Do you: Read to your students?

Allow hall passes? For what reasons? Under what circumstances?

Have students use the chalkboard or overhead?

Have students operate audiovisual equipment?

Allow general homework to be worked on in class? Under what circumstances?

Expect students to hand in work on their own to preassigned areas?

Encourage discussion during movies, labs, or busy work?

- Let your substitute in on some of your classroom management techniques. For example, perhaps when the volume level in one part of the classroom gets too high, you have a habit of saying, "If I can hear your conversation from here, you are too loud." Consider jotting down a few favorite expressions or tips in advance for possible use by a substitute teacher. Hearing familiar requests and instructions from a substitute can create a sense of continuity—and it lets students know that you have contact with the substitute and he/she with you.
- Substitute teachers cannot make promises or threats that they cannot keep. Have handy a prepared explanation of how you handle consequences and rewards, and give the substitute the authority to follow through on your policies. Likewise, a substitute needs to be able to offer rewards, such as no homework or extra credit on an exercise.
- All teachers want to use time effectively, but when an assignment is completed early, substitutes can't just move on to the next chapter. Prepare a folder of appropriate brainteasers or free-writing prompts for the substitute to give students when a lesson runs short.

Of course you cannot hand a substitute teacher a list of do's and don'ts, but if you think about it, there are a few rules of thumb that you follow. In order to preserve a sense of security and stability in your classroom, offer a substitute some hidden curriculum pointers to maintain your classroom standards.

***Carol Welch, Elmhurst, Illinois***

# Teacher Talk

## *What If?* Exercises

I'm working on a short story unit for my sophomores, and reading and answering questions sounds very boring to me. Does anyone have any ideas to share?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk***

There's a wonderful book called *What If?* by Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter (Harper, 1990) that you could mine for ideas. Though designed as a collection of excercises for fiction writers, its ideas could easily be adapted for a unit on short stories—certain units might even make nice pairings with particular short stories.

One unit I've had success with explores pairing dialogue with action. What happens when sparring lovers are painting a room or washing a car or changing a tire together? What happens when one of them is giving the other a hair cut? Great stuff, for it helps demonstrate that half the power of dialogue lies in what isn't said—and what isn't done. Even if the lovers don't end up flinging paint or soap suds at one another—or worse—there's something deliciously suggestive and menacing about the idea that they could, they might, and they'd really like to.

***Kathy Fitch***
***Kafkaz@kwom.com***

Tips

# Teaching Hyperbole

By Carol Jago

*This is an excerpt from Chapter 2 of* NIKKI GIOVANNI IN THE CLASSROOM: "the same ol' danger but a brand new pleasure" *by Carol Jago (NCTE, 1999).*

Most students consider the formal study of poetry the epitome of school for school's sake. They contend that nobody apart from the odd English teacher cares a jot about literary devices or figures of speech. My students complain all the time.

"Can you imagine Oprah having a program on *onomatopoeia*, Mrs. Jago? I mean, really, you're tripping."

"Maybe I am, Ross. But look at the phrase you just used. When you said that I was 'tripping,' you used figurative language to tell me that you think I'm off my rocker for talking about poetry in these terms. And, look, I just did it myself. 'Off my rocker' is figurative language, too."

"All right already. You've got me tripping too. Can't we just read the poems?"

How could a teacher in her right mind refuse such a request? I reached for my copies of Nikki Giovanni's "Ego Tripping." Judith Langer at the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement at the University at Albany, SUNY, describes a master high school teacher she observed who began her class discussions with a single word: "So?" I tried this with my students after reading "Ego Tripping."

Ms. Jago: So?

Students:

"This girl has some kind of problem."

"You're the one with a problem. She's hot and she knows it."

"But who wants to be around a girl with that kind of ego? Not me."

"Maybe not you, but I do. She's playin' with you here. Something wrong that you missed that?"

"What are you talking about?"

"She knows she's exaggerating on purpose for fun. You're missing the whole thing if you don't see that. I forget the word for it. Mrs. Jago, what's it called?"

On cue, I am invited to teach the class about hyperbole, intentional overstatement. What I love about this kind of lesson is that it grows out of a genuine student request.

And lest you think this a one-of-a kind experience, let me assure you that I have shown "Ego Tripping" to more groups of students than I would readily admit to having taught, and every one included a student who quickly saw the point of Giovanni's exaggeration. Accessibility is one of the particular joys of teaching Nikki Giovanni's poetry. Kids "get" it.

I ask students to identify examples of hyperbole in the poem and, if they felt so inclined, to illustrate them. We soon have a bulletin board full of examples of this formal literary term whose meaning (I hope) will stay with students long past their sojourn in this class. And even if they forget the term, the sense of it will stay with them. It is not the naming of things that matters but the sensitivity to what language can do to us as readers. This is the point of teaching students literary terminology.

My analogy may not make sense if you have never seen beachcombers roaming the shore in earphones and carrying something that looks like a watering rod, searching the sand for lost jewelry and change. It is a common sight around the Santa Monica Pier. I tell students that they don't want to become this kind of a reader, one who sifts a poem in search of literary terms.

*It is not the naming of things that matters*
*but the sensitivity to what language can do to us as readers.*
*This is the point of teaching students literary terminology.*

BEEEP! Found a simile! BEEEP! Three metaphors! BEEEP! Litotes, at last!

Literary terms help readers to talk about what they see and feel in a text. They help us express in shorthand what we want to communicate to others about a poem or passage. Terminology has not been invented to give the College Board items for the AP Literature exam but to help us be more articulate about what we see and feel when we read. Good readers learn to pay close attention to every word of a poem, but they don't mistake the identification of a literary device for their goal. The goal is a powerful experience of the poem.

***Carol Jago teaches English at Santa Monica High School and directs the California Reading and Literature Project at UCLA. She can be reached at jago@gseis.ucla.edu***

To order *NIKKI GIOVANNI IN THE CLASSROOM*, call the NCTE Customer Service Department at 1-877-369-6283. Stock # 52120-3125; price $12.95 ($9.95 NCTE members).

# Focus on Writing

## Reflection and Self-Evaluation

Reflection is a vital part of learning. Students often get papers back, and never bother to analyze their performance. Setting goals is an important step to success in any endeavor. To assist students to this end, I have created guidelines to help students evaluate what they've learned and what areas they still need to work on. This self-evaluation writing assignment combines reflection and goal making skills.

The students keep a portfolio of all their tests, quizzes, and projects throughout the year. Halfway through, and then again at the end of the year, I ask the students to put their papers in categories: vocabulary, essays, creative writing, literature tests/quizzes, and projects. After they have completed that, the students give themselves an overall grade for each category.

Next, the students write an essay where they explain their grades. They may give reasons, examples, and support for their grades. In an additional paragraph, I have the students rate their class participation on a ten-point scale. In the conclusion of the essay, the students assign themselves an overall grade for the class, by averaging their category grade. The self-evaluation essay should be considered as part of the overall grade, either in the essay category or as class participation.

Here's an example of one student's essay:

**Self Evaluation**

Overall, I feel this has been a challenging and exciting year. In the following paper I will evaluate this past 8th grade school season based on four areas: participation, preparation, tests and quizzes, and writing. For each of those areas I will give myself a grade (A-D). Then in my conclusion I will find out my final grade for the year.

First of all, I feel I did a pretty good job in the participation area. I did my best not to call out and distract the class. I suggested new ideas or pointed things out in our Literacy Circles, and I worked hard to find information when I was working with a classmate on our research papers. Therefore, in this area I feel I deserve an A.

Second, for preparation I feel I could have improved a little in one of the requirements for this area: keeping an orderly notebook. I have all the things needed in our notebooks there, but it's a little hard to read. I know I could have kept it neater. Otherwise, I always copied down the daily journal entries, and everyday I came equipped with a notebook, and a pencil to class, except for maybe a little slip up here and there. Completing homework was not a problem, and I was asked to a luncheon each marking period because I finished all the homework assignments given out. For preparation, I give myself an A-.

Next is the tests and quizzes area. I think I did extremely good on my tests and quizzes. By checking my English portfolio, I received 21 A's, 2 B's, and 1 C. I always prepared for tests or quizzes. To prepare, I would gather up all the papers and notes that the quiz or test would be on and I studied them by reading them over a few times. I don't think I could have improved that much more. Of course I could have gotten 100's on all the tests or quizzes, but I'm happy with my grades. I really think I deserve an A in this area.

Finally, the last area of this evaluation: writing. The writing this year I felt was a little more difficult than last year. I tried my best on our writing assignments and I think I did a good job on them. My introductions have gotten a lot better, I've learned how to get the readers attention, how to write a paper involving causes and effects, problems and solutions, and more! For this area I feel I deserve an A.

In conclusion, after looking over the grades given out above, I feel my final grade is an A. I believe I deserve this grade not just for completing all the requirements for each area, but also for the fact that I tried my best this year.

When students have completed their self-evaluation essay, I have them complete a student improvement plan (SIP) (see page 13). I borrowed this acronym from the professional improvement plan (PIP) idea for teachers.

In the SIP, students identify specific areas for improvement and set goals for the following year or semester. When the students conclude a need for themselves, it makes a much bigger impression than when teachers or parents tell them what to do.

In addition, if the students make their own goals by identifying their own weaknesses, they have a much greater chance of following through with them.

Most students enjoy this assignment simply because they get to look at their old papers and write about themselves. Some of my students have told me this was their favorite assignment for the year. I did the assignment myself, and found it informative.

***Melissa Eckstein, Gateway Regional High School, Woodbury Heights, New Jersey***

## Student Improvement Plan

**Class** _____

**Teacher** _____

**Name** _____

**Date** _____

**Directions:** These questions are to be answered during a conference with the teacher. You should refer to your portfolio.

1. What did you do well this year?
2. What areas do you feel you could improve upon next year?
3. What helped you to be successful?
4. Define two goals for improvement next year.
   1.
   2.
5. How will you accomplish these goals?

# FOCUS ON WRITING

## Family Lore

Writers such as James Joyce, Maxine Hong Kingston, Alex Haley, and Amy Tan have derived meaning from the present by studying their own cultural roots. Not only do their insights provide the students who study them a window into history, familial behavior patterns and long-standing dreams, but it is almost impossible to read them without drawing parallels to ourselves and our own ancestral histories.

The teenage years are times of self-discovery. Maybe this is why this project has evolved into a meaningful and memorable experience for my students of Creative Writing over the years. After all, to understand who we are today requires knowledge of where we have come from; understanding the past helps to set important goals for the future.

This unit encourages intergenerational family communication and understanding, so, it has often been a noted favorite among parents. It seems to clarify why parents push children toward a particular path, react certain ways under stress, and maintain belief systems. It gets parents and students talking about things that really matter to teens, and, therefore, fosters growth.

I like to start the discussion by reading a section of Maxine Hong Kingston's novel *THE WOMAN WARRIOR* entitled "No Name Woman." This selection deals with a Chinese ancestor of Kingston's who was an unwed mother and therefore was disowned by her family and disgraced by her village—it ends tragically. Given the nature of the piece, introductory discussion by the instructor is, I feel, necessary.

My class is comprised of juniors and seniors, and I would be hesitant about assigning it to younger audiences. Yet, the piece is extremely powerful and students are eager to discuss both the plot and Kingston's knack for evocative storycrafting.

As a supplement to "No Name Woman," we view an episode of Bill Moyers series *THE LIVING LANGUAGE* called "The Work of Maxine Hong Kingston" (which was originally produced for viewing on PBS). This in-depth interview provokes students to see the importance of the personal family research they will soon be undertaking. In the video, Kingston is interviewed about her writing process, as well as the personal and literary significance of uncovering her own ancestral past.

On the day this video is shown, I distribute a handout sheet of creative response options (see page 14) and we discuss them. I also make clear that I will be willing to help anyone shape a project of their own, based on family history and personal interests.

There are many supplementary readings possible to add as models; I like to cover "Two Kinds," a selection from Amy Tan's *THE JOY LUCK CLUB* (re: the piano recital) at this point. I also show the movie adaptation of *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*. It's an effective tool to teach recursive plot structure and add further ▶

# Handout for Family Lore Project

*Choose from among the following ideas for your family lore project or develop an idea of your own, with teacher approval.*

- Research and write a character sketch of a family member or ancestor that effectively reveals the character of that person through the use of at least three anecdotes about his or her life. Write this in essay form and prepare to present it to the class. Include pictures, documents, or memorabilia that help this person come alive for your audience.

- Research and write a narrative that explores an issue, event, or relative in your family that no one talks about. Refer back to the stories we've studied to help shape your work.

- Conduct an interview with a family member about a challenging incident or time period that someone in your family lived through. You may go directly to the source for information, or, if this happened generations ago, you may ask someone to retell the account of the story from memories of what they were told.

  Some possible topics might include: a war the person fought in; a time of political upheaval; the Great Depression; an earthquake, flood, tornado, or other natural disaster; financial difficulty; sickness or disease; and so on. Try to get details about how the person managed to come through this time successfully, and what the effects were on this person and on the family. A tape recorder might come in handy for anecdotal research. Summarize your findings in an essay.

- If families could create holidays, what day would yours choose to celebrate? Write a detailed description answering this question and explaining why. Or, write about a family ritual or celebration that has become a tradition. Try to capture the sensory details and the true spirit of the event.

- Write a detailed narrative about a turning point for your family—a time that changed your lives.

- Find an object of family significance to you that you just can't get rid of. For example, outgrown clothes and old toys are sometimes hard to let go of, because throwing them out would acknowledge change or loss. Bring up anecdotal memories as you try to explain your sentimental attachment to the object in an essay.

- Imagine what would happen if your family lived in the White House as the presidential family. Use real character traits, mannerisms and hobbies of your relatives to illustrate them in this situation. Use your sense of humor to develop a revealing parody.

- The U.S.A. is said to be a great "melting pot" of cultures. Research and retell the story of your ancestors' immigration and/or adjustment to American culture. This can be written as historical fiction based on real events or as an essay. Or, research and write a story that focuses on your family's interactions (in the present or the past) with an immigrant family or a family from another culture.

- Create a detailed family tree that is visually interesting and shows your artistic talents. Research the last four generations of your heritage to present visually. Include names, occupations, experiences, and other important information that you find of interest in your research. Write an accompanying short essay that summarizes the most interesting of your findings.

- Develop a project idea of your own and clear it with your instructor.

depth of meaning to students' own anecdotal research. I also like to assign the story "Sausage and Beer" by Stephen Minot.

To be sensitive to students in diverse family situations, it's important to offer options that students can pursue if they aren't able to interview family members or don't feel comfortable doing so. The assignments on the handout sheet can all be customized so that instead of dealing with immediate family and family history, students are reflecting and writing about their friends, extended family, guardians, and others close to them, or even so they're given leeway to be creative and fictionalize their responses.

Finally, we take the time to critique each other's rough copies, in a workshop, before sharing each final copy. Often, students ask to bring in photos or mementos to add to the presentations. We have an informal roundtable discussion; this is time consuming, but students gain a lot from it and are eager and attentive. Since process, form, and content are analyzed by their peers, and students are aware of the sharing session from the outset, the quality of the finished product is impressive.

***Susan Dobbe Chase, Poynette High School, Poynette, Wisconsin***

# TEACHER TALK

## Recommended Resources for a Poetry Unit

I'm going to be doing a two-week intro-to-poetry unit with freshmen. Can anyone suggest books which have interesting and engaging activities in them?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk***

*GETTING THE KNACK: 20 POETRY EXERCISES*, by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford. (NCTE, 1992).

*IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND: A POET'S PORTABLE WORKSHOP: A LIVELY AND ILLUMINATING GUIDE FOR THE PRACTICING POET*, by Steve Kowit. (Tilbury House, 1995).

*POEMCRAZY: FREEING YOUR LIFE WITH WORDS*, by Susan Goldsmith Woolridge. (Crown, 1997).

*THE POET'S COMPANION: A GUIDE TO THE PLEASURES OF WRITING POETRY*, by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux. (Norton, 1997).

*ADVENTURES OF DOCTOR ALPHABET: 104 UNUSUAL WAYS TO WRITE POETRY IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE COMMUNITY*, by Dave Morice. (Teachers and Writers, 1995).

*GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE: WRITING AND READING POETRY*, by Florence Grossman. (Boynton/Cook, 1982).

*CREATING POETRY*, by John Drury. (Writers Digest, 1991).

*TEACHING POETRY WRITING TO ADOLESCENTS*, by Joseph I. Tsujimoto. (NCTE, 1998).

*THE PRACTICE OF POETRY: WRITING EXERCISES FROM POETS WHO TEACH*, by Robin Behn and Chase Twichell. (HarperCollins, 1992).

*POETRY WINDOWS AND MIRRORS: THE SKETCHBOOK APPROACH TO WRITING AND READING POETRY*, by Priscilla Adams (Carolina University Press, 1995).

Georgia Heard's work is generally directed to elementary and middle school teachers, but I think I've learned more from her than anyone else about teaching poetry. I highly recommend her latest book on the subject:

*AWAKENING THE HEART. AWAKENING THE HEART: EXPLORING POETRY IN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL*, by Georgia Heard. (Heinemann, 1998).

Another text for elementary teachers that has great stuff adaptable for older writers is:

*A CELEBRATION OF BEES: HELPING CHILDREN WRITE POETRY*, by Barbara Juster Esbensen. (Holt, 1995).

Kenneth Koch's stuff (*ROSE, WHERE DID YOU GET THAT RED?* and another, the title of which escapes me now) is often recommended but he's not among my favorites.

***Gloria Pipkin***
***gpipkin@i-1.net***

What a great bibliography of books for the teaching of poetry, Gloria! May I also add to your list:

*IMPORTANT WORDS: A BOOK FOR POETS AND WRITERS* by Bill Brown, William Stafford, Malcolm Glass. (Heinemann, 1991).

*WORD WEAVING: A CREATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING AND WRITING POETRY* by David M. Johnson. (NCTE, 1990).

By the way, the other Kenneth Koch title that you couldn't remember is probably:

*WISHES, LIES, AND DREAMS* by Kenneth Koch. (HarperCollins, 1980).

A good book for the writing of nature poetry is *A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow: A Guide to Writing Poetry from Nature* by Lorraine Ferra (illustrated by Diane Boardman). (Gibbs-Smith, 1994.) It's available from NCTE. It's more geared toward elementary than secondary.

***Lind Williams***
***LindW@provo.k12.ut.us***

# Teacher Talk

## Suggestions for Studying Native American Literature

I got word today that the Native American literature class that I've been trying to get going for a couple years will be happening next year. I currently teach American Literature and use some poems and texts [by Native American authors]. We also read Chief Joseph's speech "I Will Fight No More Forever" and watch the movie. I make a point of discussing authenticity—the end credits include tribal affiliations and the film has an endorsement from the NEA.

Are there Native American readings or lessons that you use? Does anyone else have a Native American literature class?

***Wendy Weber***
***snwweber@nedcomm.nm.org***

Here are the titles of some Native American works I've used.

**Books**

*Lakota Woman* by Mary Crow Dog
*Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko
*Love Medicine*, *Tracks* by Louise Erdrich
*Reservation Blues* by Sherman Alexie
*Solar Storms*, *Power* by Linda Hogan
*Yellow Raft in Blue Water* by Michael Dorris
*American Indian Myths and Legends*, edited by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz

**Short Stories**

*The Lone Ranger & Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* by Sherman Alexie
*January 26* by N. Scott Momoday
*Lullaby*, *The Man To Send Rainclouds* by Leslie Marmon Silko
*Where I Come from Is Like This*, *Who Is Your Mother?*, *Red Roots of Feminism* by Paula Gunn Allen
*American Horse* by Louise Erdrich
*Aunt Moon's Young Man* by Linda Hogan

Hope this is of some help.

***Adrienne Rose***
***arose@wco.com***

May I add a couple of titles? To Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen* is a perfect accompaniment.

Additionally, *House Made of Dawn* and *On the Way to Rainy Mountain* are both excellent.

The poetry of Simon Ortiz can't be left out, either. Some of the most powerful I've read.

***Del Hughes***
***Clackanaw@aol.com***

Online, you could check out http://www.unm.edu/~ketchelx, Rick Mott's page, which has extensive links on Leslie Marmon Silko and other Native American resources.

Just a personal opinion, but I think Sherman Alexie is a better poet than a fiction writer. Don't leave out his poems, many of which are online, including some on my site at: http://home.earthlink.net/~uur/resource.htm#Alexie.

***Wendell Ricketts***
***uur@earthlink.net***

If you haven't already discovered Oyate, a Native organization devoted to honest and accurate portrayal of Native culture and history, check out their web site (http://www.oyate.org/), which includes annotated bibliographies of Native literature for all ages as well as teacher's guides.

***Gloria Pipkin***
***gpipkin@i-1.net***

I've taught Native American lit at various levels, and even when I'm not teaching it as a whole curriculum, I use a lot of Native American material in my classes. Here are some suggestions, in no particular order:

*The Crying for a Vision*—Wangerin
*The Night the White Deer Died*—Paulsen
*The Man Who Killed the Deer*—Waters
*Touch the Earth*—McLuhan
(this one has a great biblio of other sources)

Also, almost anything by these authors:

| | |
|---|---|
| Silko | Carroll Arnett |
| Joy Harjo | Chief Joseph |
| Erdrich | Chief Seattle |
| Hogan | Littlebird |
| Luther Standing Bear | Washington Matthews |
| Wendy Rose | William Least Heat Moon |
| Owens | Charles Ballard |

Both *The Crying for a Vision* and *The Night the White Deer Died* are YA novels, and while I've never taught either one of them to a whole class, each has been used (*White Deer* frequently) as a required outside text by students, and they loved them. *Touch the Earth* is available through amazon.com and I recommend it highly as a teacher's reference, or even as a basic class text.

Good luck and enjoy!

***Jeri Pollock***
***jeri@altavista.net***

Tips

## Poetry Collections with a Multicultural Emphasis

- *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States.* Lori. M. Carlson (ed.). Holt, 1994.
- *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep: An Anthology of Poetry By African Americans Since 1945.* Michael S. Harper and Anthony Walton (eds.). Little, Brown and Co., 1994.
- *In Search of Color Everywhere: A Collection of African American Poetry.* E. Ethelbert Miller (ed.). Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1994. A work of art with illustrations by Terrance Cummings.
- *The Open Boat: Poems From Asian America.* Garrett Hongo (ed.). Anchor Books Doubleday, 1993.
- *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry.* Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan (eds.). Penguin Books, 1994. Organized by themes rather than ethnic groups.

***—from Albert Somers'* TEACHING POETRY IN HIGH SCHOOL *(NCTE, 1999)***

*ROOTS AND BRANCHES: A RESOURCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE* by Dorothea Susag (NCTE 1998 ISBN 0-8141-4195-1). It contains adaptable lessons, historical and literary contexts for use with Native American literature, and a fantastic annotated bibliography to help in choosing books for the classroom.

A valuable part of the book is the author's in-depth analyses of dozens and dozens of "Native American" books, including some mentioned previously. Historical inaccuracies and stereotypes occur in such titles as *LIGHT IN THE FOREST* and *EDUCATION OF LITTLE TREE*, for example.

***Peter Feely***
***PFeely@ncte.org***

I would like to add the works of James Welch to the growing list. Especially *FOOLS CROW*. There is also a good collection of stories entitled *GROWING UP NATIVE AMERICAN*, but the publisher's name escapes me at this time.

Films include *SMOKE SIGNALS* and *POW WOW HIGHWAY*.

***Rod Merrell***
***rmerrell@pugetsound.net***

My Native American unit was eons ago and rather eclectic, but this is what I recall for 10th graders:

We covered some chapters of Zinn's history book (I can't recall title) to get new perspectives on US history, plus background of Columbus and contact.

During the unit we explored topics and definitions of ethnocentricism, culture conflict, concepts of community, relationship of individuals within the community, "mythology" and religious beliefs, Hollywood's stereotyping.

We discussed excerpts from articles I got from our Native American Center in Minneapolis, plus others I dug up: e.g., "Powhatan's Indians Feeding of the Virginia Settlers, 1607, and Later Dispossession, 1622" (John Smith), "Destruction of the Pequots, 1636" (Wm Bradford), "Sitting Bull, Dakota Chief: Sitting Bull's Opinion of Treaties, 1889" (Stanley Vestal), "Last Agony of the Indians: Wounded Knee Massacre, December 29, 1890,"—The "ghost Dance" religion—"Account of the Wounded Knee Massacre, 1890" (Black Elk).

We also discussed short stories: "Lullaby," "Yellow Woman," "The Man to Send Raineloud," "Tony's Story," " A Geronimo Story" and others from *THE MAN TO SEND RAINCLOUDS*.

A movie which I showed about Canadian Indian children's fate in boarding schools was a heart-stopper. I can't recall any of the credits except the title, *WHERE THE SPIRIT LIVES*.

These are poems we used successfully:

"Heritage," "Black Hills Survival Gathering," and "Song for My Name," by Linda Hogan

"Indian Boarding School: The Runaways," by Louise Erdrich

"Powwow 79, Durango" by Paula Gunn Allen

I loved the unit; we barely scratched the surface.

***Kate Murax***

# Teacher Talk

## What Is the Teacher's Role in the Writing Process?

I am a student currently enrolled in a course which examines different methods of teaching writing in the classroom. We have read numerous academic writers who each argue their own "correct" method to teaching students to write. Some of the writers argue that the teacher should remain in an authoritative position functioning primarily as a source of evaluation to student writing. Others maintain that the teacher must take a backseat and allow students to simply write. How does a teacher ever sift through all of these techniques to find the one best suited for her classroom? I'm hoping some of you will be able to provide me with some insight.

***Melissa Boisen***
***mboisen@u.washington.edu***

I won't take your time with this or that correct method. The central issue is only secondarily about method, or HOW we teach, anyway; the central issue is primarily about WHAT we teach.

The reason there is such diversity in the field harkens back to what Faulkner said about technique. If that's what we're looking for—in writing or in teaching writing (my addition)—become a bricklayer. Writing isn't about technique (or the "method"); it's about commitment to the work, in the writing and the teaching.

Teaching writing is just hard work. We have to know what to teach, and we have to do it every day in the face of what appears to be no impact whatsoever, but with the confidence that if we do it right, our most important fingerprint will surface eventually.

The teacher's role? Work like hell. Know everything. Read all the commentary about teaching writing, and think critically about it. Write every day, and write a self-report about your everyday writing once a week, noting in the self-report the implications of your own experience for teaching young writers to be better every day. Join a Writer's Workshop—in my sense, a group of practicing adult writers whose writing has sold.

Assign enough writing to your students that you have time to read, at best, a tenth of it, and what you do read, comment on, and use for one-on-one conferencing. Make sure the conferences look and sound like the feedback in those Writers' Workshops in which you participate weekly. If a teacher is passive ("back seat"), a computer program, also passive, is cheaper, more reliable, never gets tired, and never complains. Teachers are active. We get frustrated, angry, elated, and euphoric. When students see that, they know they have a teacher, not software.

Your theory (pedagogic content knowledge) is in the formation right now. You're working on it, as we all are. You don't dislike knowledge; your knowledge right now just tells you that being knowledgeable isn't as useful as practitioners' experiences. All of those practitioners are also working from their pedagogic content knowledge (theory). Your theory right now is that their theory is good. If we know enough, if we've thought critically enough, if we've taught enough, and if we've reflected enough, the theory of the practicing teacher can be enormously useful. If we haven't, it's just another theory.

And that's my theory. Have a wonderful time.

***Leif Fearn***
***lfearn@mail.sdsu.edu***

The teacher's role in teaching the writing process?

Be careful not to make this an either/or question. It is not a matter of choosing to either teach explicitly or to stand back and let 'em write. It is really necessary to do both.

Leif Fearn has written several posts [in this discussion on NCTE-talk] saying that we don't teach kids to be "better" writers merely by having them write. There needs to be an instructional component. We need to let 'em write, but we have to also show 'em how to do it.

A useful guide for me is what many in elementary language arts call the "gradual release of support" model. That means the teachers use a balanced approach between teacher-directed and student-directed writing:

Consider a balance of the following kinds of activities, the first items of which demand heavy teacher support and the last items heavy student independence:

1. Modeling writing: the teacher models his/her own writing (and the writing of others) as a way of strategically and explicitly talking about what writers do.
2. Shared writing: the student tells the teacher what he wants to write and the teacher models how the writing is composed on paper, overhead, chart, chalkboard, etc.
3. Interactive writing: the student says what he wants to write and the teacher and student together compose it on paper, overhead, chart, chalkboard, etc. (sometimes called "sharing the pen").
4. Guided writing (writer's workshop): the teacher gives guidance in the process, helps students come up with ideas through prewriting, etc. The student gets feedback

▶

during drafting, but does most of the actual writing independently. Student writes independently but the experience is scaffolded by the teacher.

5. Independent writing: the student selects own topic and format, seeks out feedback as needed. Student is in total control of the process.

Notice how these move from dependence to independence. Classroom activities need to be a mixture of these. We can't assume students will become better writers without explicit instruction. But they also need to fly with their own wings sometimes in order to become independent writers and for us to assess how they are progressing on their own.

***Lind Williams***
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I teach 7th and 8th graders in a private school with 20–22 students in each class. I have been using Nanci Atwell's writing workshop approach for three years now *IN THE MIDDLE* and could never go back to the traditional way of teaching (i.e., every student writing the same assignment).

I begin the year discussing writing territories as Atwell does. I have a long list of my own writing territories on the overhead. I give students time to start their own writing territories list and encourage them to continue adding to it.

In those first weeks I give time for journal writing almost daily (accompanied by classical musical, Enya, nature sounds music, etc.— no words), and I write along with my students. I share what I write and allow them to share when they want to.

I do short lessons on different aspects of writing/grammar usage and students copy notes and examples in a spiral/writing handbook. I also put copies of pieces I've written in the past on the overhead. I feel it's very important for my students to see me as a writer and a reader. This inspires them to do their best, and also to not be afraid to reveal themselves in their writing.

I have been fortunate to have had two sets of students for three years—grades 6–8—for their writing. It's incredible the progress they've made in that time. The secret is lots and lots of choice and lots and lots of time in class to write.

I also read poetry aloud to them constantly and encourage them to write poetry in response to everything—literature, current events, history and science lessons, adolescence, old age, school challenges. I encourage free verse and show them lots of examples.

I require 3–5 pages of writing in journals per week. I never grade for capitalization, punctuation, or spelling in journals. If they have something they don't want me to read, they can turn down the page and I won't read it.

I have each student create a writing portfolio each quarter. Richard Kent's *ROOM 109, THE PROMISE OF A PORTFOLIO CLASSROOM* has helped me greatly there. Some portfolio pieces are required by everyone. Some examples: when we are doing our Holocaust Unit, everyone has to have a book review on a Holocaust book or film; end of year, everyone has to have a "Goodbye" poem, and so on.

I also started a middle school literary/art journal. I choose pieces during the year, appoint two editors and two assistant editors, one production manager and one art director (all 8th grade), and we work like mad after school during April and May to type everything, run off copies on the photocopier, and bind them with a plastic comb binding machine. (We borrowed one from a teacher's husband the first two years. This year the Parents Association bought us one.)

The kids get so excited when they see their work in print. Since we do so much poetry, I usually am able to get the majority of our middle school students "published" even if it's just a small haiku poem. Artistic students supply me with illustrations to accompany the writing. I keep a list on the board of illustrations I need.

Hope this helps.

***Jan Stover***
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In my experience I have found that there is no single right role to play in the writing process. There are many factors to consider, especially your individual class composition.

For example, I have two classes currently. My morning class is more responsible and independent. In that class I am the facilitator, assisting them when needed and providing support to them as writers. My afternoon class, however, is much more challenging. It is rare for them to work independently unless I impose strict expectations on them, such as expecting a first draft completed *by the time they leave!*

I base what I do on Nancie Atwell and Lucy Calkins for the most part. I have at least 30 minutes of reading/writing workshop daily. Right now we are doing literature circles, so I also allow at least 30 minutes for that.

I also always begin class with reading quality literature, usually poetry, to them which leads to the day's mini lesson. They all have at least one piece of writing they are working on toward publication.

I grade nothing; I evaluate everything. During workshop time, I spend at least 10 minutes walking around, adding to my anecdotal records about each student's progress. Then I return to my own work, modeling the behavior I expect of them. I also conference with them as needed. I guess what I'm saying is that my approach is neither authoritative, functioning primarily as a source of evaluation to student writing. Nor is it taking a backseat and allowing my students to simply write, although I'm probably closer to that side if I had to choose. To me, though, that sounds like the teacher is doing nothing while the kids write. That is not accurate, nor is it professional.

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# Traci's Lists of Ten

*"Traci's Lists of Ten" are lists of thoughtful teaching tips created by Traci Gardner, a former English teacher and now Online Resources Manager for NCTE.*

*We'll be printing one of Traci's lists in each of this year's issues of Classroom Notes Plus; more lists will be made available on the Classroom Notes Plus Web page.*

## Ten Unusual Sources for Research Papers

Most of the students I see think only of books and articles when we turn our attention to research papers. To get around their over-reliance on these sources and show them the range of sources available, I use some version of the list below. I've simply given writers the list and asked them to use at least two of the categories as they search for information for their papers.

But I've also given them a shorter list, highlighting kinds of sources that make sense for the assignment; and I've given them only one of the items, using the questions as a short, and usually informal, writing assignment.

These categories work well with basic research papers and with I-Search papers. I typically use either I-Search papers or papers that ask them to interrogate the sources that they find. In the latter, I ask them to focus on the ways that the conception of the idea or subject that they are researching changes depending upon who is doing the reporting and how the reporting is done.

Because I urge students to do lots of reflection on the ideas they are researching in these assignments, the kinds of questions that I ask them about their sources in the activities below should lead to material that they can include in their rough drafts. If your students are writing a more traditional research paper, you should probably talk with them about the difference between personal reactions and reflections that belong in their research journals and the kind of writing that belongs in their research papers.

These sources make for good "show & tell"—each student can have a few minutes to share one unusual source with the rest of the class or with small groups. Often, this can be a loud session: students may want to play parts of their songs or interview or to look at a clip from their movie. There can be a lot of giggling over the absurd articles, too. Be sure to make arrangements to be in a location where exuberant students won't cause trouble for other classes.

Because of the range of sources included, the list also gives me the opportunity to talk about documenting unusual sources. We spend time talking about which of the example citations in the handbook fits the sources that they have found or which of the templates in BiblioCite or BiblioCite Pro would be the best choice.

**1.** Find an absolutely absurd article about your subject. It can be unbelievable, obnoxious, ridiculous, or silly. If you're not sure what you're looking for, think about the kind of articles that you see in the tabloid papers at the grocery store checkout. The articles in those newspapers are often about current events or well-known or exceptional people, but they don't talk about things in the same way that you'd find the information covered in the New York Times or Newsweek.

Once you've found your article, think about how it compares to the other resources that you've found. What makes it ridiculous? What believable information is included? How can you tell the difference between an absurd article and a reliable one? One word of caution: while you can choose a pretty silly article, please do not choose anything that would be unacceptable if I were to ask you to read it aloud in class to me, your classmates, the principal, or your family. Silly is ok, but rude and offensive are not.

**2.** Find a personal narrative written in first-person. A first-person narrative tells a story using words such as I, me, and my. The author of the story is writing a personal piece about the event. You could find a diary, a letter, or an essay.

As you read the narrative that you've found, compare it with the other sources that you've consulted. How does the author's point of view change the details and description that are included? What emotional language is used? What does this source tell you about your subject that you wouldn't have known or realized if you had not read this person's first-hand experiences?

**3.** Find a piece of art that relates to your subject—a print cartoon, painting, drawing, lithograph, or sculpture. The work of art you find might depict the event that you're researching, or it could be referred to in one of your sources. ▶

## Interview with Maya Angelou

I recently found this great site, which contains a wonderful interview with Maya Angelou and an audio of her reading "On the Pulse of Morning."

http://homearts.com/depts/relat/bookintr.htm

***Anne J. Arvidson***
***annejarvidson@home.com***

For instance, you might have found a quotation about your event that refers to the Mona Lisa. Your paper may not be about the Italian Renaissance, but the Mona Lisa would be an appropriate source.

Once you've found your piece of art, think about how it's related to your subject. If it depicts an event that you're researching, how does the depiction compare to the information that you've read in printed resources. If the work of art is referred to in one of your other sources, think about the reasons that the author mentioned the work. What did the author want you to think? How did the reference affect what you learned about the subject?

4. Find a movie, film, video, television program, or animated cartoon that relates to your subject. Is the item you've found a documentary or a fictional account? Are there clues in the title or advertising—do you see a phrase such as "Based on a True Story" anywhere? What is depicted, explained, or shown in the movie or film that you've found? What events or information are not included? What do the director and screenwriter want you to think about the subject after viewing this film? How do they attempt to convince you? What parts of the film are most compelling?

5. Find a world wide web page that relates to your subject. There seems to be a web page for everything these days. Your job is to find a *valid* and *reliable* web page. Does the page include facts that you've verified in other sources? How does it present the information? Where is the source located—is it on a reliable server?

For help evaluating pages, check the Research Station at http://writing.msu.edu/station (choose the "Web Evaluation" link). Once you've found your page, think about how it differs from other sources that you've found. How is the information well-suited for a web page? Would it work just as well in a book? What makes the page valuable to your project (or why isn't it valuable)?

6. Interview someone who knows about your subject. If you know someone who is an authority on your subject, you might ask specific questions about your research. You could ask about very particular facts or details. ▶

# Classroom Solutions

## Fine Art Transparencies

I'm looking for a source of fine art transparencies to supplement literature study. Can anyone help?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk***

I've been looking for these too and have several suggestions. Scott Foresman puts out large selections under the title "Literature and Integrated Studies." Our school bought the grade 12 British Literature and grade 11 American Literature versions. There are a total of 134 transparencies in the British Literature one, some fine art with prompts (17), some student writing models, and some models for active reading which are poems on transparency.

Our Prentice Hall Literature series also comes with teacher notebooks that contain fine art transparencies keyed to some of the writing assignments. We had to include a "viewing" category on our final exam this year, so I've done plenty of researching for transparencies.

The ones from the companies are the best quality reproductions, but there are two other ways to get transparencies. You can download art from the Internet at places such as http://www.oir.ucf.edu/wm/paint/auth.

Another Web link for art, which I found courtesy of another NCTE-talker, is http://www.nhptv.org/kn/vs/artlab7.sht.

I download the pictures I want onto a disk and take it to school where we have a color printer for our department computer. I use a transparency sheet made for color copiers and print my own transparency.

The second way to get your own is to look through art books for what you want and then take the book to a place like Staples which will make a color transparency for you for about $1.00. I don't find their color is as true as the professional transparencies, but if that's not important, then it's a good source for getting exactly the picture you want.

A third way to use art in the classroom involves special equipment. We have a computer that is hooked to a projector. It's on a cart so we can wheel it from class to class. You simply open the disk as you would in your home computer and the art is projected onto the classroom screen. There's no need for the transparency at all.

***Mary Filak***
***Shatzie2@aol.com***

On the other hand, you might interview someone just to find out what another person thinks about the issue. You might ask older family members what they remember about Woodstock or D-Day.

If you interview someone, be sure to ask some questions about how the person has learned what he or she knows—was the person you're interviewing at the event? Did he or she watch reports about the event on tv or newsreels or read about it in the newspaper?

Be sure to take good notes so that you can use quotations from your interview. (You might ask the person you're interviewing if you can record your interview so that you can play the tape back later as you work on your paper.)

7. Find a song or other piece of music that relates to your subject. Get a copy of the lyrics for your song, and take a good look at the details and information that are included. What can you tell about the subject from the lyrics in the song?

Make a list of the facts that are included, and a separate list of the opinions. How many hard details are included? How do the details fit with the personal opinions that the songwriter is expressing? How does the way that the ideas and facts were expressed in the song compare to the ways that they are presented in your other sources? What does a listener gain from this song that can't be gained from reading about your subject in a book or article?

8. Find a piece of literature—short story, novel, poem, play—that relates to your subject. How much creativity has the author used in talking about your subject in the piece of literature that you've found? Which details are fictional, and which details are factual? How can you tell the difference? What experiences does the piece of literature focus on? What do you know about the author and the author's background? What qualifications does the author have to write about your subject?

9. Find an editorial or a letter to the editor that relates to your subject. Check the editorial section of newspapers, journals, and magazines. Editorials and letters to the editor are usually opinion pieces. The author wants to make a particular point about a current event or issue. Good editorials and letters include facts and details in addition to the author's opinions.

Outline the facts and opinions in the source that you find, and consider how they compare to the facts and opinions that you have found in other sources. How emotional is the piece that you've found? Is the author reliable? What do you learn from this piece that you wouldn't have known otherwise?

10. The *other* category—find some non-book, non-article resource that is related to your subject. Be creative. You might find a map, a recipe, some technical instructions, an advertisement, a computer program, or a speech.

For the source that you find, you need to do two things. First, explain why the source is relevant to your research. What does it tell you or show you? Second, explain what the source gives you that other sources haven't. If you had stuck to books and articles, what would you have missed?

***Traci Gardner is NCTE Online Resources Manager.***

## TEACHER TALK

# Combatting Racism in the Classroom

I teach 7th grade and have recently had a problem with my students making racist comments in the classroom. They find it amusing to tease each other throughout the day; I don't think they truly mean or understand what they are saying (or at least I hope they don't), but I don't know what to do. Any ideas about how I could make them see the seriousness of the subject?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk***

Check out the Teaching Tolerance page of the Southern Poverty Law Center Web site (http://www.splcenter.org/teachingtolerance/tt-index.html.) I highly recommend the quality and relevance of their approach. I have successfully used the magazine US AND THEM, which is part of the "Shadow of Hate: A History of Intolerance in America" kit. This kit includes the excellent video, "History of Intolerance in America." (It appears from the Web site that they are allotting one kit free per school, upon written request on letterhead from principal, department chair, or director. Requests for free items may be faxed to: Order Dept. at 334/264-7310.)

*Teaching Tolerance* is "a free semiannual 64-page magazine providing educators with resources for promoting interracial and intercultural understanding." Individual teachers and other educators may subscribe by sending a request on letterhead. There is also a colorful set of eight "One World" posters available free to teachers, and the Web site includes a page of classroom activities.

***Peg Wheeler***
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## Censorship Problem?

NCTE offers advice, helpful documents, and other support at no cost to K–12 teachers, schools, and districts that are faced with challenges to literary works, films and videos, or teaching methods. Leave a message at 800-369-6283, ext. 3848, or call Charles Suhor, NCTE/SLATE Field Representative, directly at 334-280-4758.

You can also report a censorship incident via NCTE's Censorship Web site at www.ncte.org/censorship. In addition, this site offers an area to contribute links and citations related to censorship resources, as well as contribute to a planning forum to help develop the NCTE Censorship page further. With your help, this site can develop into a rich collection of online ideas, stories, and resources for teachers and others struggling with censorship issues.

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## Literary History and Calendar Sites

At the site listed below you'll find a calendar with obscure and notable events in literary history, with emphasis on world literatures. On July 9, 1942, for example, Anne Frank and her family went into hiding in Amsterdam. (The one drawback I encountered was a host of Javascript error messages to wade through. In response to the error message, "Do you wish to debug," keep selecting "No" and the error message will disappear.) You can subscribe to the calendar and have each day's events sent via e-mail. There's also a search feature at this site.

Literary Calender: an almanac of literary information
http://litcal.yasuda-u.ac.jp/LitCalendar.shtml

***Gloria Pipkin***
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For Gloria Pipkin's complete list of 26 literary history and calender sites, visit the CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS Web page at www.ncte.org.

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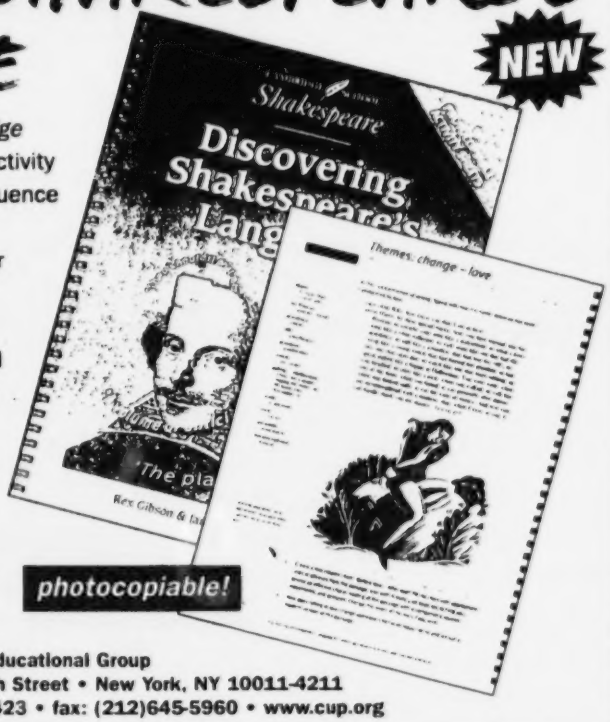


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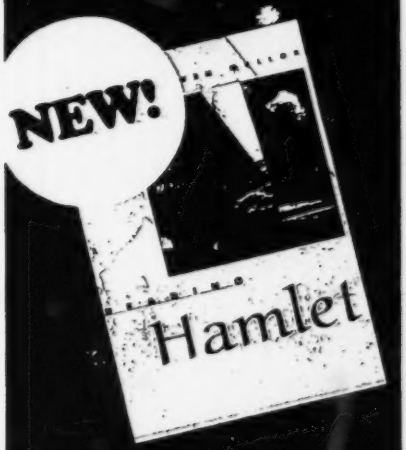


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*Brian Moon*

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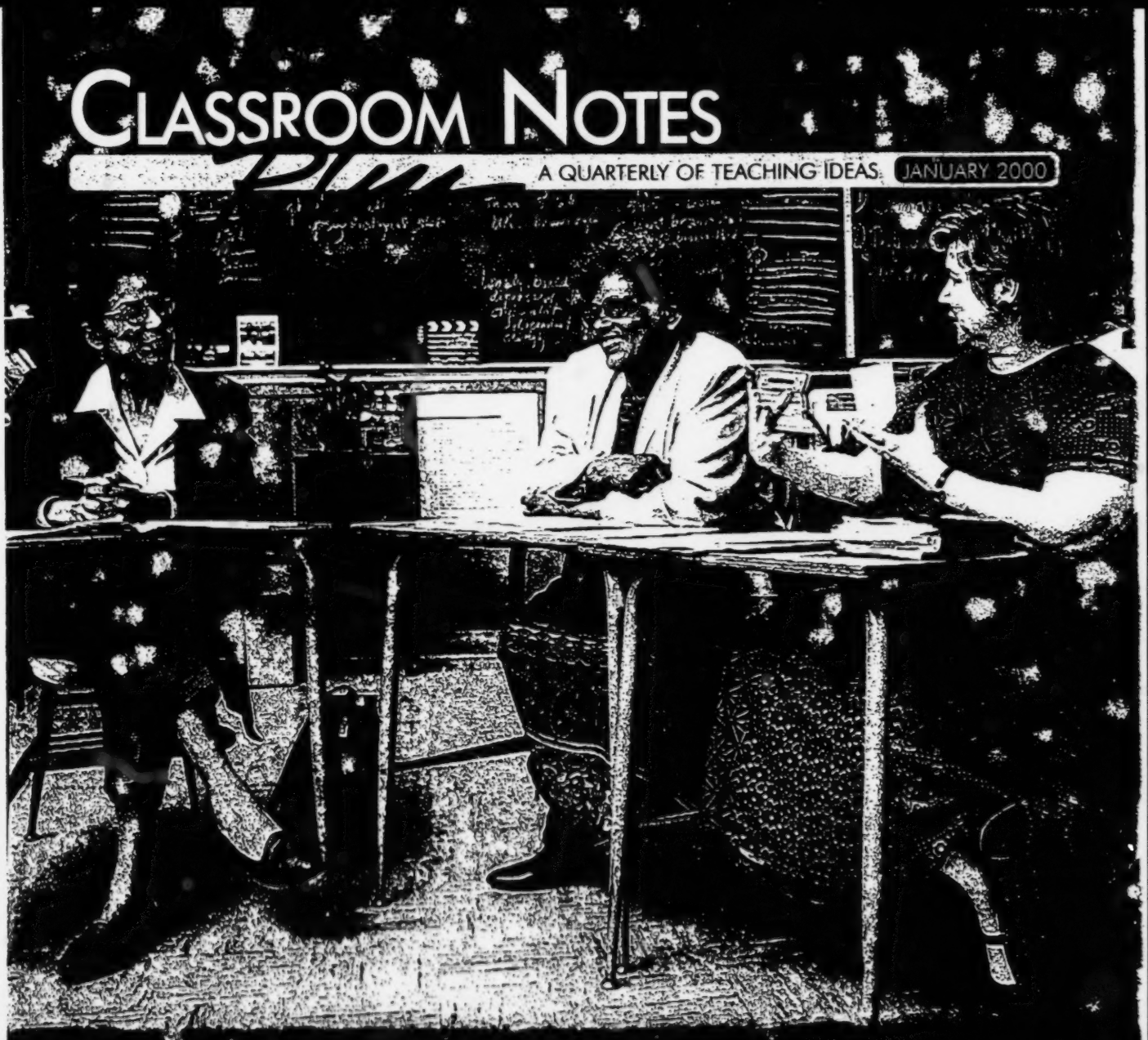
# Classroom Notes Plus

A QUARTERLY OF TEACHING IDEAS JANUARY 2000



## In This Issue

**Teaching the Decades**
**A Reading Log Handout**
**How Do You Handle Late Papers?**
**Ten Ways to Write about Style**

From the National Council of Teachers of English

65

CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS

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*Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.*

—William Butler Yeats

*Watch for additional* **Tips** *throughout this issue!*

# IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Welcome to the first *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* of the new millennium. We hope this issue helps you and your students to start the new year off right. Among the strategies and tips submitted by readers and gleaned from the NCTE-talk listserv for this issue are suggestions for teaching grammar, narrative writing, the metaphor, and good reading habits; plus a trio of articles on "teaching the decades," an in-depth look at teaching Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," and a variety of viewpoints on handling late papers.

## Matters of Convention

All of us who teach writing are concerned about our students learning how to handle the conventions of the English language correctly, efficiently, and effectively. Research, common sense, and experience have taught most of us that direct instruction of interminable length and drill exercises of grammatical and usage-related minutia do not work in addressing this problem.

However, I have found that direct instruction, combined with holding students accountable in a fair fashion, can go a long way toward making progress on this front.

Simply, I teach a grammatical principle at the beginning of each class each day, which means that in a Tuesday/Thursday class I can teach approximately 30 conventions a semester.

I base these on student need and requests. I use my own personal knowledge, any handbook lying around my office, and books like Kirn and Darcy's *A COMMUNICATIVE GRAMMAR* (McGraw-Hill, 1996) and Karen Gordon's *THE WELL-TEMPERED SENTENCE (Ticknor and Fields, 1983) [for punctuation]* and *THE TRANSITIVE VAMPIRE (Times Books, 1984) [for grammar]* to inform my instruction.

I provide direct instruction, give a few examples, and ask students to take notes on the issue under consideration and keep these notes for study and reference during revision in a loose-leaf notebook, preferably a small one the size of a handbook.

I encourage students to add sentences—from their reading and their own writing—that illustrate each principle. In fact, after direct instruction, I write on the chalkboard the sentence of the day, which may or may not have an error in it. We discuss whether or not there are errors, and if so, what they are and how they can be corrected. We also try to identify potential trouble spots in these sentences and discuss options.

Finally, one day a week, either in class or on their own time, I ask students to review all of their writing for my class from the previous week and identify one matter of convention they either have learned or have had reinforced by each writing they have done that week. They record the title or the nature of the writing, the date they wrote it, and what convention they learned or had reinforced.

These summaries are maintained in students' writing portfolios, or their personal notebooks, for future reference and for my review, which happens sporadically and during their portfolio submissions.

Students tell me this relatively innocuous approach is not threatening, is useful, and creates both a sense of fun and an attitude of seriousness about paying attention to matters of convention when writing.

***Edgar H. Thompson, Emory and Henry College, Emory, Virginia***

*Tips*

## A Story for Teaching the Metaphor

I've found that a good jumping-off point for teaching the metaphor is a short story by Canadian writer Budge Wilson entitled "The Metaphor."

It's about a girl named Charlotte whose grade 7 English teacher, the flamboyant, impassioned Miss Hancock, gives her "the gift of the metaphor." Charlotte begins to write metaphors about her pristine house, her cold, perfect mother: "My mother is a white picket fence."

Charlotte encounters Miss Hancock again in grade 10, when high school sophistication has set in, and pretends she doesn't know her although she has kept writing metaphors in her diary. Her classmates make fun of her beloved teacher, who eventually loses her life under the wheels of a school bus (metaphorically killed by the school, I guess). When her mother brushes it off with an "oh, her," Charlotte flees to her room and finds solace in her writing: "Miss Hancock was a birthday cake. . . ."

This story has lots of lovely metaphors; lots of discussion points about peer pressure, mother-daughter relationships; and lots of inspiration for students to write metaphors of their own.

Can you tell I love this story? It's published in a paperback anthology of short stories by Wilson entitled *THE LEAVING* (Scholastic, 1990). (All the stories are great—we use the book for grade 10 students.)

***Diane Leckie***
***dleckie@total.net***

## Reports from Private Eyes

This assignment was originally designed for the first week of school as a variation on the "What I Did over My Summer Vacation" essay, but it could be used at any time during the school year.

It's a narrative writing assignment with a twist—it asks students to describe a recent event or activity in which they participated outside of school, and to do so in the role of a private eye. This helps to emphasize the habits of close observation and attention to detail—both useful habits for aspiring writers to develop.

I use this idea with sixth graders; I think it could be an effective and enjoyable exercise at many levels.

I started this activity by asking my students to think of an interesting or unusual event or activity they participated in recently. An event of no more than several hours' duration works best.

I asked them to imagine that they were able to observe themselves in this activity or event—to imagine, in fact, that they were detectives or private eyes observing and reporting on the activities of "the subject" from a hidden observation point.

The students' assignment was to write up a report of "the subject's" activity and behavior. I pointed out that students would need to visualize the scene carefully, concentrate on details, and remember to stay in character as the detective while they wrote.

Working from the picture in their mind's eye, and using their powers of imagination, they would need to record observations, make predictions, and draw conclusions about the people and events. Phrases such as "it appears that," "it seems as though," and "my guess would be" were encouraged.

Students could refer to observable details ("the girl with the red hat," "the older woman with the large umbrella," and so on) to distinguish among the people they were describing, but they couldn't use details that would not be known by the private eye.

I also told students they were welcome to manipulate the details and language of their report to try to create a sense of suspense and intrigue.

Before students began their reports, we brainstormed ideas and phrases as a class. When students were warmed up, they began jotting notes and working on rough drafts. Many found it challenging to avoid using the first person.

After the drafts were revised and edited, I gave each student a large circle of paper, simulating a spy-glass view, and asked them to illustrate the scene they had described in their report. These illustrations of the scenes were attached to the reports.

Students then wrote "submitted by" and a phony detective name on their report, and we stamped all the reports in red ink with the school secretary's "confidential" stamp, for a very official-looking final product!

The finished reports were great discussion starters among the students; volunteers enjoyed playing the role of detective and putting on phony voices to read their reports to the class and answer questions.

This activity can be an enjoyable way to help students get to know one another better at the start of the school year, but it's also a useful exercise to focus on the value of observation and detail at any time of the year.

***Julie Holmberg, Oxford Road Elementary, New Hartford, New York***


## The NCTE Web site offers teaching resources, news, and more. Visit www.ncte.org for links to:

- Mobil Masterpiece Theatre's American Collection—a collaboration among NCTE, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Mobil Corporation, and WGBH Boston.

  Current offerings on the American Collection Site include resources for teaching Eudora Welty's *The Ponder Heart*, a literary timeline, the American Writing Gateway, and a literary map of the U.S. **(www.ncteamericancollection.org)**

- advice and updates on censorship, plus a form for reporting censorship incidents **(www.ncte.org/censorship/)**

- news stories and resources on standardized testing **(www.ncte.org/special/testing.shtml)**

- NCTE resolutions—full texts representing the stands NCTE has taken on issues in education since 1970 **(www.ncte.org/resolutions/)**

## Good Reader Strategies

Teachers can help their students learn good reading habits by modeling useful strategies for them, and then asking them to follow suit.

One good reading habit is taking a few minutes to think about the reading material—posing questions, making predictions, activating background knowledge—before starting to read. A good reader uses this technique as a hook to connect with, make sense of, and remember what she is about to read. Meaning comes from connections the reader makes with the printed word; without this connection there is no meaning.

To model this for your students, try this:

Using the book of your choice, look carefully at the front and back covers, the book flaps, and so on to predict what the book will be about. Thinking out loud, try to connect your thoughts with your background knowledge. Here's an example that uses the book *In the Lake of the Woods* by Tim O'Brien:

> On the front cover there's a picture of a lake surrounded by woods. That reminds me of the lake we used to spend summers on in New Hampshire. It seems very peaceful, a great place for a vacation. And there's a boat. My family loves to sail and water ski. The boat is going straight out into the water. I wonder where.
>
> I wonder why the cover is so bright red. That's not usual for a quiet peaceful lake. Maybe that means that something not so peaceful will go on.
>
> I know that Tim O'Brien writes a lot about Viet Nam. I have read another book of his; I really liked it. Maybe he's going to write again about that war and its effects on the people who fought in it.
>
> And the book flap talks about a marriage that goes wrong, about somebody trying to get away from secrets. I think that people sometimes hide things from people they love, often with bad results. . . .

Ask students to pair up or form small groups and to follow your lead in reviewing the books they've chosen to read. They are to read, speculate, and make connections with the title, cover, book flaps, author information, and so on. Others can chime in and add their ideas and experiences when appropriate. Active engagement with the book is the key.

When holding conferences with individual students, when introducing books in class, when beginning textbook readings, during read-aloud times, and so on, encourage students to interact and connect with the readings as much as possible. The goal is for students to begin to make this a "forever" pursuit—something they do automatically when they read.

***Pam Mueller, John Stark Regional High School, Weare, New Hampshire***

### ALA Booklists

The American Library Association has a list of books on its Web site recommended for college-bound students: http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists.

Kim Chism Jasper
kjasper@stockton.k12.mo.us

Note: The above list and other useful lists are located on the Young Adult Library Services Association page of the ALA site. That page includes links to Best Books for Young Adults; Teens' Top Ten; Top 10 Quick Picks; 1999 Popular Paperbacks; and more.

## A Reading Log Handout

I use a Reading Log Handout to enhance the ways that my eighth-grade students respond to literature.

At the beginning of the year, I distribute a handout sheet (see page 5) containing a numbered list of ideas for reading logs. I tell the students that they need to choose a book that they want to read from the classroom library, the school library, or any other source.

Students are responsible for writing a two-page reading log to be handed in every week. Depending upon the reading level of the student, I may or may not make a firm deadline for each book, e.g., four logs (one month) per book. Obviously, these logs are suited to fiction, but they can also be applied to biography, poetry, and some nonfiction.

The students can choose freely which type of logs they will write, with one rule: they are only allowed to choose option #7 (drawing a picture) once per book. I've received many interesting and creative reading logs that were inspired by option #12 (use your imagination to invent your own type of log).

For example, one of my current students is a violinist who is reading biographies of famous composers. He wrote one short solo violin piece for each of the books he read. He played the piece for me and then handed in a paragraph about how the piece related to the composer's music or life. He enjoyed the reading, he made meaningful connections between reading and a personal pursuit, and both of us enjoyed his playing.

The idea is not only to get students hooked on reading, but to get them hooked on *being thoughtful* about what they read.

***Richard Roundy, West Side Collaborative Middle School, New York, New York***

# Reading Log Handout

Reading l gs are a way to demonstrate that you are being thoughtful about what you are reading. There are a few simple rules. They are:

1. Choose a book on your level—one that is not too hard or too easy.
2. Choose a book that interests you.
3. You are responsible for finding your own books. You may use the class library, the school library, the public library, the bookstore, books that you have at home, etc.
4. Reading logs are due every Monday.

At the top of your page, please put your name, the title of the book, the author's name, the page you are on, and the log number for this particular book (for example, if this is the third log you have written for *Go Ask Alice*, write log #3).

Here's the list to choose from:

1) Imagine you are a character in the book and write a diary entry about your experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

2) Imagine you are a character in the book and write a letter to another character about your experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

3) Write a letter to a character in the book giving him or her advice.

4) Imagine you are the author of the book and describe what happened to one of the characters years before or years after the time of the book.

5) Write a short composition on one of the *themes* of the book. (For example, if one of the themes is *love*, you might write a composition about love, using examples from the book.)

6) Write a poem, song, or story about the plot, character(s), theme, or another element of the book.

7) Draw a picture or diagram based on one of the characters or scenes from the book. (You can only do this one once per book.)

8) Interview one of the characters about the story or about anything your imagination comes up with, asking questions and giving answers for him or her.

9) Review the book. Give your opinions about it; cite examples and quotes from the book to support why you think it is an interesting book or not. Would you recommend it to a friend? Why or why not?

10) Write about the main problem or conflict in the book. Who is involved and what is it about?

11) Finish the sentence "I love (hate) the way the author (or a character) . . ."

12) Use your imagination and invent your own type of reading log. This could take many different forms, but it should somehow involve thinking about what you've read and reacting to it. (After you've thought up an idea, please check with me before beginning.)

# Focus on Teaching the Decades

## Doing the Decades

*The full version of this article by James Brewbaker appeared in The ALAN Review (Spring 1999), the journal of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN).*

At a high school or middle school not far from you, they're "Doing the Decades." Students, guided by social studies and English language arts teachers, work in learning teams to explore the ins and outs of the 1920s, 1950s, or other periods.

They examine major historical events, inventions, lifestyles, the cost of groceries and automobiles, sports, and other aspects of the social landscape. They may interview family members about what teen life was like in the decade *du jour*, view old movies, and learn the "latest" songs and dances. They may examine photo albums, their parents' high school annuals, or collections of historic photographs. They may listen to classic radio programs.

At Salem High School in Conyers, Georgia, one such decades unit is under way. Classes here are grouped heterogeneously. Interdisciplinary teaching is the rule rather than the exception, due by-and-large to the school's membership in the Coalition of Essential Schools, the national network of schools that, under the leadership of Theodore Sizer, is implementing a series of restructuring principles.

Evaluation, whenever feasible, is based on authentic public exhibitions as opposed to pencil and paper tests. Students may create murals reflecting "their" decade, present skits, role play important historic figures, create "you-are-there" videos, and develop magazines modeled after *Life* or *Ebony* into which they put the results of their individual research.

Literature of the era is normally one dimension of "Doing the Decades." High school youngsters studying the 1920s may read *The Great Gatsby*, while those investigating the 1930s may read *The Grapes of Wrath*, contemporary novels published in 1925 and 1939, respectively.

From the perspective of the year 2000, these novels shed light on life in their times. Teachers are likely to incorporate other genres as well: the short stories of Hemingway and Faulkner, the poetry of Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes, the plays of Thornton Wilder and Arthur Miller.

Young adult literature of two sorts may help teachers "Do the Decades" well in their classrooms. First, there is a wealth of historical fiction set in each period of American history. In these works—in, for example, novels such as Carolyn Meyers' *White Lilacs*—writers painstakingly recreate times and places consistent with historical records. The San Francisco earthquake, the Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, the Viet Nam War—these and other pivotal events of history may bore young people when they come straight out of the history book or a teacher's lecture. When linked to young characters *experiencing* those events in a work of fiction, however, the same history may capture the interest of many teens.

This article provides an overview of a number of such books—quality historical fiction—for each decade of the twentieth century.

Other works, those not written as historical fiction, mirror the times in which they were written. S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, for example, is timeless in many respects, but it also captures the lifestyle and cultural mores of working-class adolescents near Oklahoma City in the 1960s.

For middle or high school students studying a decade different from their own, *The Outsiders* or other YA titles written at the time can be quite useful. A fairly sophisticated learning task would be to compare and contrast the home life, recreation, and school experiences of Ponyboy Curtis and other characters with those of teens in the year 2000. What devices that are now commonplace were unknown in the mid-sixties? What did high school students do for entertainment? How did they spend Saturday night, and how does this compare with the experiences of today's teenagers?

A similar inquiry might focus on Maureen Daly's classic ▶

## Classroom Solutions

### Hall Passes

This has been my policy my whole four years of teaching. The bathroom pass and sign-out sheet are next to the door. If the pass is there, students just get up, go to the door, sign out, and come right back.

***Del Hughes***
***clackanaw@aol.com***

I have a plush toy rooster, Rogaciano, who is the bathroom pass. If he's out, no one asks. He must go with.

***Tracy Miller***
***soteloa@servidor.unam.mx***

I have a plastic dinosaur for a hall pass. Some kids don't like to be seen with toys, but it's great fun.

***Lyn***
***Ninna8764@aol.com***

*SEVENTEENTH SUMMER*, written in 1942. How has dating changed in the past 50 years? How do today's adolescent girls—their goals, their values, their feelings about boys—differ from their grandmothers at a similar age?

Let's take a quick look at twentieth-century decades and the young adult literature that skillful teachers may offer to middle- and high school students as they "Do the Decades."

### *1900–1909: National Expansion and the New Americans*

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the United States was a very different place from what it is today. For one thing, there were 45 states, with Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming having been admitted in the 1890s. Oklahoma would join the union in 1907.

Though somewhat few in number, examples of literature for young adults set between 1900–1909 reflect at least some of the experiences and issues of the times.

Joan Dash's nonfiction account *WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED*, for example, shows how young immigrant women brought the shirtwaist industry to a halt when they protested labor conditions in 1909. Laurence Yep's *DRAGON WINGS* captures the Chinese American's immigrant experience against the backdrop of the San Francisco earthquake and fire. Another recent work, Kristiana Gregory's *EARTHQUAKE AT DAWN*, is told from the perspective of Daisy Valentine, a fifteen-year-old maid working for Edith Irvine, a young woman whose photographs, even today, are a primary record of the disaster.

A less well-known book among those listed below is Thomas Fall's powerful *THE ORDEAL OF RUNNING STANDING*. Recently reissued, the novel traces the experiences of Running Standing, a Kiowa Indian living in a hostile White world. The novel's action shifts from such settings as the Oklahoma Territory to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania and back again.

### *Literature for Young Readers Set in 1900–1909*

Dash, J. *WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED: THE WOMEN'S FACTORY STRIKE OF 1909*. Scholastic Trade. 1996.

Fall, T. *THE ORDEAL OF RUNNING STANDING*. University of Oklahoma Press. 1970.

Glaser, D. *THE DIARY OF TRILBY FROST*. Holiday House. 1976.

Gregory, K. *EARTHQUAKE AT DAWN*. Gary Dean Gullickson. 1994.

Yep, L. *DRAGON WINGS*. HarperCollins. 1977.

***James Brewbaker is professor of English Education at Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia.***

*To read the full text of James Brewbaker's article "Doing the Decades," visit the CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS Web page at www.ncte.org/notesplus. Material covered includes:*

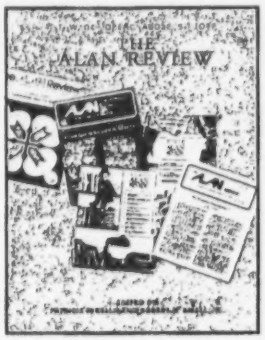
- 1910–1919: Immigration and the Struggle for Human Rights
- 1920–1929: The "Roaring Twenties" and the Jazz Age
- 1930–1939: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Rise of Hitler and Soviet Communism in Europe
- 1940–1949: World War II, the Holocaust, and Its Aftermath
- 1950–1959: Prosperity, the Cold War, Sputnik, and the Civil Rights Movement
- 1960–1969: Assassination, Race Conflict, Feminism, and New Lifestyles
- 1970–1979: Vietnam and After, Watergate, and Social Unrest
- 1980–1989: The Reagan Years, AIDS, Cultural Diversity, and Poverty amid Prosperity
- 1990–1999: Urban Violence, Technology, and Uncertainty about a New Millennium

*For more information on ALAN and* THE ALAN REVIEW, *visit these Web sites:*

http://english/byu.edu/ALAN

http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournal/ALAN/alan-review.html

## TWO DECADES OF *THE ALAN REVIEW*




Once dismissed as hot rod and romance novels, the genre of young adult literature has come of age over the last 20 years. A recent release from NCTE collects the best writings related to young adult authors and their work that have appeared in *THE ALAN REVIEW*.

*TWO DECADES OF* THE ALAN REVIEW includes excerpts of interviews with YA authors Sue Ellen Bridgers, Robert Cormier, Virginia Hamilton, Paul Zindel, and others; articles by and about YA authors; essays that look at the body of YA literature from diverse perspectives; and reflections from past editors on the genre of young adult literature.

To order *TWO DECADES OF* THE ALAN REVIEW, call the NCTE Customer Service Department at 1-800-369-6283. Stock no. 55448-1325. Price $26.95 non-NCTE members; $19.95 NCTE members.

## Time Travel

What do your students know about life in the past? Here's an easy way to find out and to give your students an opportunity to think, learn, and write about it.

Before class, print one date (year only) on an index card for each member of your class; each of your students must have a year of his/her own. Start with 1955, and work backward in five- or ten-year increments until you have a sufficient number of dated cards.

At the beginning of class, tell your students that today when they leave school, they are going to have an unusual experience. As they begin traveling home, they will notice that things are starting to look different to them. Cars seem to be older models than they are used to seeing; people on the street are wearing out-of-style clothing and sporting unfashionable hairstyles.

The farther they travel from school, the more they notice differences. Supermarkets have turned into general stores; shopping malls have disappeared. (You can mention changes that are particular to your own city or town to make the exercise more realistic.) Finally, they arrive home—a home that looks older to them. When they enter the front door, the first thing they notice is a letter, lying on the table, addressed to them. They open the letter and realize it is from an aunt they have never met. She writes that she has lost touch with their family and wants to hear about everything that has happened to them in the last 10 years.

Now, you walk around the room, giving each student an index card, face down. When you have finished distributing the cards, ask them to turn the cards over. Whatever date they have is the year they are now living in. The students are to write a letter to their aunt, fulfilling her request.

Of course, you should emphasize to the students that they are to use whatever historical knowledge they have (and that they can research) about the year they have been given, but everything else may be fiction.

Depending on the students' grade levels, they can be encouraged to use a completely different persona, write in dialect, write from an older or younger viewpoint, and so on. For instance, your twelve-year-old student Stephanie who is "living in" the year 1930 could choose to write as if she were an unemployed forty-year-old male who is suffering the effects of the Depression; conversely, Stephanie could write from her own point of view.

Students should write a draft in class; then volunteers can be solicited to read their drafts aloud. They should have revising time, and then the final drafts can be due a few days later (or kept in a portfolio).

If time allows, you can incorporate a class trip to the library to fill in details and check for accuracy. All your students will benefit, and you will not find yourself reading about electric lights and riding lawn mowers in the year 1850!

This assignment works best for middle and high school levels, but it can also be adapted for elementary grades. It also fits quite well as part of an interdisciplinary unit.

***Cheri Louise Ross, Penn State Capital College, Middletown, Pennsylvania***

## The Nifty Fifties

As a companion study to the Roaring Twenties unit that a colleague developed, I created a unit based on the fifties. My research brought into focus many connections between the fifties and the present, and I felt the unit would provide ▶

## TEACHER TALK

### Resources for Teaching Values

Although I don't agree wholeheartedly, I have to give a presentation on ways to teach values in the classroom. Does anyone know of any Web sites that deal with this?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk.***

The entire December 1998/January 1999 issue of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP* was dedicated to this question; it should be available at your local university library. Some of the articles in each volume are also down-printable from their Web site: http://www.ascd.org. (Articles from this issue which are available online are: "Is School the Place for Spirituality? A Conversation with Rabbi Harold Kushner"; "Averting Culture Wars over Religion"; and "Longing for the Sacred in Schools: A Conversation with Nel Noddings." Other articles not available online include: "Seeking Clarity about Crisis"; "The Nurturing Potential of Service Learning"; and "Spirituality—Letting It Grow in the Classroom," an article by former NCTE Deputy Executive Director Charles Suhor.)

In addition, you could take a look at these: *THE JOURNAL OF MORAL EDUCATION* and *THE JOURNAL OF BELIEFS AND VALUES*.

And these Web sites:

http://www.forerunner.com/forerunner/X0116_Teaching_the_Virtues.html

http://www.splcenter.org/teachingtolerance/tt-index.html

http://www.mcc.org/; http://www.charactercounts.org

http://www.newrules.org

***Jeri Pollock***
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the students with the opportunity to analyze and determine these relationships.

I began with video clips of the fifties. I borrowed these from our history department; any movie that has scenes from the time period could be used. *SEPARATE BUT EQUAL* and *EYES ON THE PRIZE* have scenes that can be used to introduce the Civil Rights movement. I also used a Scholastic laser disc titled *HISTORY IN MOTION*. Clips from some of the sitcoms on television during the fifties are also useful.

A discussion based upon what the students knew about the decade followed. Next, the students interviewed someone with memories of the fifties. Previous interviewing assignments provided the necessary framework. Sharing the results of the interviews took place the following class period.

After our preliminary discussion, a visit to the library provided material for research exploration. I provided each student with a list of approximately 50 topics, ranging from political figures to styles of dress. Some topics were Levittown, hula hoop, ducktails, transistor, Salk, Rosa Parks, the Kitchen Debate, Sputnik, Rosenbergs, and Eisenhower. Working in pairs and using their notebook paper, the students briefly identified the topic and recorded the name of the source and page number.

After sharing the results, each student selected a topic from the list, or one of her choosing (with teacher approval), and researched it. Requirements included notecards, bibliography cards, outline, paper with parenthetical documentation, and works cited.

I asked each student to include a connection between the fifties and the present: this was to encourage students to think about their lives today and about conditions then and now, and to think about cause-and-effect relationships between events in history. There are many interesting comparisons and observations to be drawn. The fast-paced lifestyle of today, fast foods, travel, and vacation resorts all have connections to the fifties, when two brothers began assembly-line production of hamburgers; and when a man taking his family on a trip decided there was a need for a place for families to stay, which led to the establishment of the first motel chain.

Further, a student might trace the pressure to achieve in school, the rankings of our educational system worldwide, and even the amount of new information available through computers and the Internet to Sputnik and the fallout from that event. Or a student might consider the Civil Rights movement and what lasting effects it had on our lives today.

Independent reading was juxtaposed with the research. Since Ernest Hemingway received the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 for *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*, I selected it for a classic. The students summarized approximately 10 pages in a journal and responded to the summary. A teenage novel set in the fifties served as the second novel assignment. Rosamond du Jardin's *SEVENTEENTH SUMMER* and novels by Mary Stolz and John Tunis were possible choices.

The journal for this reading was based on a list of questions I wrote using Nancie Atwell's *IN THE MIDDLE* as a reference. Some sample journal questions included: What were some of the problems in the story with which a character had to struggle? If you could change any part of the book in any way, what would you do? Which character would you like to have for a friend, and why? Relate something that happened in the book to an event in your own life.

The students made about 10 entries. The entries later served as the basis for a comparison of a teenage novel of the fifties and the nineties.

As a special complement to our study of the fifties, the school dance instructor provided our class with dance lessons in the cha-cha and the jitterbug.

The culminating activity was the creation of a magazine which reflected the decade of the fifties. The magazine, modeled after a *TIME MAGAZINE*, included a cover, advertisement from each member, table of contents, letters to the editor or editorial, articles on sports, medicine, world news, national news, and technology. The point of view of the writer was that of someone living during that time.

The students, working in groups, decided who would be responsible for each part. Everyone had to design an advertisement, and students helped evaluate one another's work to ensure that they were being accurate to the time.

For instance, some ads appropriately used personalities such as Elvis Presley, but included 1-800 telephone numbers. A little research revealed that this was not a common method of contacting a company at that time, so these students revised their ads for accuracy. To write the articles, students either used information uncovered when writing the research papers or researched additional topics.

As a final step; students in my class and students in my colleague's class, who were studying the twenties, met and shared their magazines. This provided an effective avenue for discussion, not only of these two decades, but of how these two decades had influenced the present and what changes might be still to come.

***Mable Pippin, Tomball Junior High School, Tomball, Texas***

## Hemingway Web Site

I was just browsing and found this wonderful Hemingway site:

http://ww.kcstar.com/hemingway/ehpapa.htm

It includes photos, letters, biographical information, and articles that Hemingway wrote as a reporter for the *KANSAS CITY STAR*. I am going to use this in my class. Enjoy!

***Kristinia Nowlin***
***knowlin@home.com***

# GUIDE TO SELECTING MULTICULTURAL BOOKS

As the U.S. recognizes our ethnic diversity, we must introduce our children and young people to other cultures and find material relevant to their own. The following guidelines offer criteria to use when evaluating multicultural books:

1. Look for factual historical representation as well as an authentic portrayal of the character's thoughts and emotions. Beware of books in which facts have been changed to cater to reader's expectations or to create artificially happy endings. Biographies that leave out flaws and failures are also suspect.

2. Avoid stereotypes by looking for material that explores and celebrates its members' diversity and individuality.

3. Check that language is current (i.e., Native American, instead of Indian) and that dialects are authentic, but not used in a derogatory manner. Think carefully before presenting literature that contains racial slurs.

4. Consider the author's perspective and expertise on the subject. Is the author a member of the culture she writes about? If not, does she portray the story accurately?

5. Note the age of the book to determine the currency of information. Check all material for outdated language, terminology, and interpretation, regardless of the copyright date.

6. Select books best suited to the student's emotional, intellectual, and developmental level. Some books address specific audiences by their culture or their maturity level. Other books are more suited for general audiences.

7. Avoid stories that stop to explain cultural details. Cultural information should be woven into a story as a normal part of the character's life.

8. Be aware of subtle biases in a work that portrays both sides of a controversy. An author's personal disposition may affect his objectivity.

9. Watch that picture books and illustrations portray the differences in individuals and ethnic groups. Avoid illustrations of Caucasian features with darker coloring to represent members of another ethnic group. Illustrations should be attractive to young people and reflect everyday life within a given culture.

*Our Family, Our Friends, Our World* is a comprehensive reference guide to multicultural fiction and nonfiction, written by Lyn Miller-Lachmann. It is published by R. R. Bowker, a division of Reed Reference Publishing (U.S.A.) Inc. Copyright © 1992 by Reed Publishing (U.S.A.) Inc. All rights reserved. Orders may be placed by calling 800-521-8110. The book is also available in many libraries.

## FOCUS ON LITERATURE

# Revenge May Not Be So Sweet: Edgar Allen Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"

> *"The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge."*—Edgar Allen Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado," 1846

I recently overheard the following conversation in the hall between two girls, probably ninth or tenth graders. It reveals something important about our society, particularly teenage society:

"Did you hear what she called me?" one red-faced girl said to her friend.

"Yeah, I heard. You're not going to let her get away with that, are you?" she responded.

"No way. I'll make her pay. You'll see," the red-faced girl responded with an evil look.

This brief exchange highlights an attitude that is prevalent today among teenagers. Many of them seem to believe that if someone insults or hurts them in some way, then seeking revenge on that person is a perfectly acceptable, even desirable, response.

Fortunately, students' interest in the subject draws them to the excellent literature that explores some of the possible negative consequences of revenge.

Most secondary teachers are familiar with Edgar Allen Poe's often anthologized short story, "The Cask of Amontillado." This is a classic story of revenge in which the main character and narrator, Montresor, is obsessed with seeking revenge on Fortunato, a wine connoisseur. Montresor tricks Fortunato into accompanying him down into the family catacombs, where he chains him to a pair of iron staples and then buries him alive behind a wall of stone and mortar.

Montresor relishes the mental torment of his victim, whom he leaves alone in the dark, waiting in terror for his death. In the end, Montresor reveals his own madness when he screams a little too loudly at his victim, and the reader realizes that Montresor committed this crime 50 years ago, and that he is telling his story as a confession, perhaps to a priest.

This story has an "over-the-top" quality that many modern students enjoy, yet it paints a frightening picture of obsessive revenge-seeking. Study of this story allows students the opportunity to examine their own beliefs about revenge and to gain insight into the views of others; it challenges students to consider some of the possible negative consequences of seeking revenge.

Through class and individual study, students begin to understand that talking might be a better way to solve problems with other people rather than a vengeful, violent act.

If time allows, this story might be paired with another work of literature that deals with a similar theme. For example, it works nicely with Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers" or a longer work such as S. E. Hinton's *THE OUTSIDERS*. In addition, the story might serve as an introduction for students who plan to read a series of works involving the theme of revenge and related issues.

For example, students might read one or more young adult novels such as Lois Duncan's *KILLING MR. GRIFFIN*, Walter Dean Myers's *SCORPIONS*, or Luis J. Rodrigues's *ALWAYS RUNNING*.

Students might also read stories like Robin F. Brancato's "Fourth of July" and Max Shulman's "Love Is a Fallacy," and longer works such as Herman Melville's *MOBY DICK*, Emily Bronte's *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*, Alexandre Dumas's *THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO*, or William Shakespeare's *OTHELLO* or *RICHARD THE THIRD*. They might also view a film such as *WESTSIDE STORY*.

While Gothic horror fiction is a mainstay of young adult literature, many students have not seriously studied this literature, despite finding it exciting and enjoyable. Therefore, another important reason to have students read "The Cask of Amontillado" is to provide an opportunity to study a key element of this kind of fiction, as well as of literature in general—irony.

### *Exploring Student Opinions*

I begin with an activity that uses students' ideas and opinions about revenge. Before students read the story, I ask them to fill out a sheet entitled "Revenge Opinionnaire." (See the handout on page 13.)

After students have responded to all of the statements on the opinionnaire, I compile the results on the board. Then, beginning with the statements for which there is the most disagreement, I lead a class discussion of our responses to each statement. I encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their responses and to debate differing opinions. Since the statements on the opinionnaire require students to take a stand and because there are no right or wrong answers, a lively discussion invariably ensues. Students become actively involved in thinking and discussing.

One purpose of the opinionnaire and the follow-up discussion is to get students interested in the characters and issues developed in the story the students are about to read. The opinionnaire also provides a framework or context that will help students overcome their initial problems with some of the difficult and even archaic vocabulary and the maca- ▶

bre setting for the story, the skeleton-filled catacombs of a nobleman's palazzo in Italy, probably sometime in the early nineteenth century. Through discussion, students are not only alerted to the story's themes and issues, but are better prepared for following the plot and understanding Montresor's ironic narration of the story.

Like Shakespeare's Iago and Richard III, Montresor takes the reader into his confidence, assuming he or she will approve not only of his revenge—he wants his crime to be perfect and he wants Fortunato to know exactly what is happening to him and why—but also of the clever and grotesque manner of it, and share his gloating satisfaction. However, as the story develops, most readers also identify with Fortunato, and share his fear of the catacombs and his horror of being walled up alive to die slowly among the skeletons of Montresor's ancestors.

In discussion, students are encouraged to consider a wide range of possible ideas related to revenge. Some students wisely point out that insults are just words and that people hurt other people in ways that are far worse than with insulting comments. They point to the senseless mass murders of civilians in Kosovo and elsewhere as examples of the truly horrible things people can do to other people.

As we discuss the various ideas that students bring up, they begin to consider a wide range of possible responses to insults. For example, they see how others have responded to insults by seeking revenge in positive ways or by rising above seeking revenge and talking to the person who insults them.

Once we have discussed most or all of the items on the opinionnaire, I try to bring the discussion to a conclusion by focusing on the these questions: Is revenge ever justified? If not, why not? If so, under what conditions? And, if so, what are some positive and healthy ways to seek revenge?

I write students' ideas on the board and ask them to write them down in their notebooks for future reference. Focusing our discussion on these questions helps students put our discussion of revenge in an appropriate context. It also provides a crucial link between their own ideas about revenge and those that they will encounter in the story they are about to read.

Next I ask students to read the story and keep in mind the ideas we have discussed. After the reading, I lead a brief class discussion of the story, making sure students have a basic understanding of the plot and some of the difficult vocabulary. For example, I make sure that they understand terms like "Amontillado," "motley," "roquelaure," and "flambeaux," as well as the following key Latin phrases, "Nemo me impune lacessit" and "In pace requiscat."

### *The Author's Message and Students' Lives*

Once I am convinced that students have a basic understanding of the story, the potentially problematic narration, and the difficult vocabulary, they are ready to deal with the irony. I divide the class into small groups and ask them to determine from evidence in the story how Montresor, Fortunato, and the author, Poe, would respond to the statements on the opinionnaire.

In addition, I ask them to respond to these questions:

- Montresor says that his "heart grew sick" because "of the dampness of the catacombs." Do you believe what he says? Why or why not?
- Montresor tells the story in such a way that he seems to revel in his own cleverness in tricking and murdering Fortunato, and yet his story takes the form of a confession. What is Poe saying about revenge?

After working out responses to these questions, the class reassembles to discuss and debate their findings. Both small-group and class discussions are usually quite lively. One reason for this is that students have thought about these issues prior to reading and have gained confidence in discussing them in class.

In addition, the statements on the opinionnaire provide students with specific and concrete ways to talk about the actions and motives of the characters and the message Poe wants readers to understand about revenge. ▶

## Classroom Solutions

### Bulletin Board Publishing

Here's something I like to do in my classroom. I reserve a long wall-bulletin-board, divided into sections by class period, for marked student papers. When a writing assignment is graded, it is posted on the bulletin board for a couple of weeks, then it moves into the portfolio binder for safekeeping. (Students have the option to mark an assignment "Do not post" if they don't want it on the board, but almost everyone likes this informal publishing.)

At the beginning of the year, I put a royal blue construction paper sign above the board that says "Hall of Fame." Whenever a truly excellent piece of writing is submitted, whether a formal essay, a short story, a poem, or whatever, I mount it on blue paper and put it in the Hall of Fame for all to view. By the end of the year, I usually have about 12 to 15 of these on display.

***Monica Bomengen***
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# Revenge Opinionnaire

**Directions:** Read each of the following statements. Write *A* if you agree with the statement or *D* if you disagree with it.

**Agree or Disagree**

_____ 1. One should always forgive and forget.

_____ 2. If you do not seek revenge on those who are cruel to you, you will invite others to be cruel to you.

_____ 3. Only a madman would kill someone to avenge a wrong.

_____ 4. Forgive, but never forget.

_____ 5. An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth.

_____ 6. There is nothing like sweet revenge.

_____ 7. Having feelings of revenge is normal, but acting on those feelings is something else.

_____ 8. It is always best to turn the other cheek.

_____ 9. People who are cruel or mean deserve a taste of their own medicine.

_____ 10. An unavenged wrong is like a festering sore.

_____ 11. There is nothing wrong with seeking revenge against someone who has really hurt you.

_____ 12. Only a coward would fail to seek revenge when someone has wronged them.

_____ 13. Smart people seek revenge only when they are certain they can get away with it.

_____ 14. Two wrongs do not make a right.

_____ 15. The trouble with seeking revenge is that it will come back to haunt you.

_____ 16. If someone insults your honor, you must seek revenge.

_____ 17. If more people would try to resolve differences by talking, we would have a lot less violence.

_____ 18. No matter what the cause, revenge is never justified.

As the groups report their answers, students begin to formulate important conclusions. They realize, for example, that instead of growing sick from the "dampness of the catacombs," Montresor's heart actually "grew sick" because of the guilt and remorse he was feeling.

Furthermore, they say that Montresor wanted his revenge to be perfect, and that he even notes at the end of the story that no one has found Fortunato's bones "for half a century," but ironically the reason he is confessing 50 years after the murder is because he is now consumed with guilt for what he has done. He, in fact, is the one who ruins his perfect crime. In this way Poe undercuts the old saying that there is nothing quite as sweet as revenge.

Discussing the statements on the opinionnaire in terms of what Poe would probably say about them is an important element in helping students interpret the web of irony and formulate important conclusions about the story.

For example, it is through this discussion that many students come to see that while Montresor might agree with the statement that "An unavenged wrong is like a festering sore" (statement #10), Poe would probably not agree. In fact, the events of the story suggest the opposite: Montresor's sick heart or "festering sore" comes about not from his "unavenged wrong," but as a result of guilt and remorse for his vengeful murder.

Finally, I ask students to return to the opinionnaire one last time. I ask them to fill it out again for themselves and to compare how they responded before they read the story. As we discuss their *before* and *after* responses, it is interesting how many of them have revised their opinions.

For example, before reading the story, many of my students thought that people who insult others deserve a taste of their own medicine (statement #9), but after reading the story, many students feel differently.

As one student put it, "I used to think that the best way to get revenge was to do something even meaner than what the person did to you, but now I don't think that solves anything. I think maybe you should try to talk to the person, or instead of doing something mean do something nice. Show the person how you should act toward other people." This discussion makes students more conscious of the impact that the story has had on them.

***Follow-up Activities***

Discussing how students' attitudes have changed as a result of reading the story is a natural follow-up writing situation, particularly for students who might be caught up in the notion that one must avenge an insult.

I ask students to write a composition in which they explain how and why their opinion about two of the statements on the opinionnaire has changed after reading the story. I ask them to explain what their opinion was before reading the story and why, and what their opinion is after reading it, and to provide supporting evidence from the story to explain any change in attitude.

Another natural follow-up writing assignment is based on discussion of which statements on the opinionnaire Poe would probably agree or disagree with and why. There is usually considerable disagreement about how and why the author might respond to some of the statements, and this disagreement provides a natural follow-up writing situation.

I ask students to write a composition explaining why they think the author would agree or disagree with one or two of the statements which the class is debating. I encourage them to write it in the form of a letter to one of the students in the class who disagrees with their viewpoint.

I also give students an opportunity to rewrite the ending of the story. I ask them to imagine that Fortunato manages to escape from the tomb in the catacombs. I encourage them to answer the following questions in their new ending: What will Fortunato do once he escapes from the catacombs during the carnival? What will he do to Montresor? Like Montresor, will he plan a perfect revenge for what Montresor has done to him, or will he take some other action? If he seeks vengeance, what will he do and how will he do it? If he takes other action, what will he do, how will he do it, and why?

These follow-up activities reinforce the strategies students have learned in reading and analyzing "The Cask of Amontillado." They also provide a means to determine how well students have learned these strategies.

***Larry R. Johannessen, Barat College, Lake Forest, Illinois***

## PBS Online

PBS *TEACHER PREVIEWS* is a weekly online newsletter from PBS Online designed specifically for pre-K–12 educators. Each week the newsletter lists new Web features with classroom resources and taping rights, PBS local station resources, professional development opportunities, and products from PBS Video.

Visit *TEACHER PREVIEWS* at http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/previews/previews/shtm.

Archives of past issues are available at http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/previews/backissues.shtm.

***Kate Mura***

Tips

# "I Want to Write a Mystery": Using the Internet for Source Material

*This is an excerpt from "Surfing the Net: Getting Middle School Students Excited about Research and Writing" by Jean Boreen. "Surfing the Net" is Chapter 6 in* WEAVING A VIRTUAL WEB: PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES, *edited by Sibylle Gruber (NCTE, 1999).*

When I asked my middle school students to "do research," I expected them to find information on specific topics and incorporate what they had found into short I-Search papers (Macrorie, 1979) or persuasive essays. In giving these assignments, I hoped that students would take their facts, descriptions, and statistics and develop compositions that showed both an understanding of format and of the rhetorical choices possible when writing these types of essays.

During "Surf the Net," we found that using the Internet as a research tool could offer students additional ways to approach writing, especially in how the middle school students considered their rhetorical choices. Specifically, a student might begin research on a topic, a situation, or a place with the intent of writing one type of paper—informational essay, short story—and change her mind because of the wealth of options provided by the sheer volume of information found during prewriting.

Debbie loved mysteries. She also knew exactly what she wanted to accomplish during her three weeks: write a mystery in short story form. What she didn't have figured out were the specific details connected to the plot machinations she had in mind. Debbie began with a Net search on Carlsbad, California, a place where she had once been on vacation. As she and her university teacher, Mark, scanned sites, they found a picture of a flower field with a windmill in the middle of it. Debbie decided that this was where the main action of the plot would be. From there, she pulled up the "America's Most Wanted" site and looked for the kind of face she wanted her murderer to have; this sight proved too intriguing, though, as Debbie and Mark spent two full days reading the background blurbs on each case pulled from the site.

As Debbie's experience shows, students can get bogged down easily and become frustrated while surfing the Web. A possible solution to circumvent information overload is to ask students to step back from their research and reconsider their writing strategies based on the data gathered.

In our example, Debbie reconsidered and decided to re-outline the action of her story. Instead of packing the first chapter with physical characteristics of the protagonists and antagonists, she created a more action-filled beginning and let the characters show more of themselves through their interactions. Then, using the Internet information she had found, she began to contemplate how later chapters might look.

*What teachers can do to avoid indiscriminate surfing is to make students read the information on each site thoroughly, then jot down a few notes or bookmark sites that had a great deal of information. In this way, students have to consider each site not only for its entertainment value, but also for its informational worth.*

### *The Novelty of Interactive Sites, or "Meet the Spice Girls!"*

Interactive sites have the potential to be highly motivational for younger students who are visual learners.

Much like the educational games developed for younger children, interactive Web sites can present—with sound, pictures, and voice-overs—how a scientific concept like the bonding of molecules was conceived and then illustrate how the individual molecules are drawn together, how they bond, and what the resulting molecular structure might look like (http://www.nyu.edu/pages/mathmol/). The possibilities of what may be seen and heard on interactive sites are only limited to the imagination of the person who developed the site.

Allan bounced—literally—into class on the first day; we should have suspected then that he would be a student who would look for a high-energy topic to research and write about. Allan was an ardent "hip-hop" fan, and the English band the Spice Girls was one of his favorite groups.

The first site Allan found as he and his teacher, Samantha, looked for information about the band was an informational site that had a picture of the five band members and a short bio on each one. Allan dutifully bookmarked the page but clearly was less than thrilled ct what he found. ▶

# TEACHER TALK

## THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S COMPANION

I am considering purchasing Jim Burke's *THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S COMPANION: A COMPLETE GUIDE TO CLASSROOM, CURRICULUM, AND THE PROFESSION*. My question is, who out there has read it and found it useful for veteran (7 years—not quite veteran, but not new either) teachers?

***Vicky Hathaway***
***ride2587@ride.ri.net***

I have *THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S COMPANION*. I bought it at our CATE (California Association of Teachers of English) convention. It is not just for new teachers—it's for us USED teachers too. I have tried to put my finger on why I like it. What I come up with is right there in the title. It's a comforting companion. When you have a question about a topic, you can usually find a way to begin the conversation of searching for your answer. It may not have the definitive answer, but there's enough to get started. It also covers an amazing array of issues, and the reference list is outstanding.

***Peg Wheeler***
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*THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S COMPANION* has its own Web site at this address: http://www.englishcompanion.com.

Not only does the site give you a good preview of the book, it contains a wide range of resources for English teachers. Definitely worth bookmarking.

***Gloria Pipkin***
***gpipkin@i-1.net***

I've taught for nearly 30 years, and still find *COMPANION* invaluable. It's easy to read, and often reminds me of things that I used to do, but have kind of forgotten.

***Joan Brown***
***rojobrow@infinex.com***

I read *THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S COMPANION*. I have been teaching for nearly 20 years and I still found a good deal of "fodder" in the book. It's certainly one that new teachers MUST have, but it validates and encourages those who have been teaching for awhile, too.

There were forms and lists that were useful. Many of the ideas were ones I have used and am using already, but some fine points were added that I have incorporated into my lessons.

The specific works (novels, poems, professional literature) that Burke mentions are ones I have followed up on. *TRANSFORMING VISION: WRITERS ON ART* and *MAPS OF THE MIND* are just a couple that really have me excited.

P.S. Burke cites a great deal of research to support certain practices in the progressive classroom. If you need to write any rationales for methods you use, you will find some references to specific researchers there.

***Connie B.***
***cbleicher@aol.com***

## "I Want to Write a Mystery"

*Continued from page 15*

On his second try, a blast of music took the entire lab by surprise. The slightly glazed look in Allan's eyes was replaced by an excited gleam as other students rushed over to see what he had found. On the screen, the Spice Girls danced as their mouths moved almost in sync with the music coming from the computer's speaker (http://www.serveyou.com/spice/songs.html). From that moment on, Allan was hooked, and he spent the rest of research week looking for similar exciting sites.

One cautionary note: Samantha found out very quickly that if she let him, Allan would simply bounce from site to site unless something unique caught his attention.

What teachers can do to avoid indiscriminate surfing is to make students read the information on each site thoroughly, then jot down a few notes or bookmark sites that had a great deal of information. In this way, students have to consider each site not only for its entertainment value, but also for its informational worth.

This type of evaluation lends itself to the kind of critical thinking we want all of our students to embrace. Students need to read, evaluate, and choose information based on an understanding of why certain facts or ideas are more important within a specific assignment or in their search for enlightenment on a topic.

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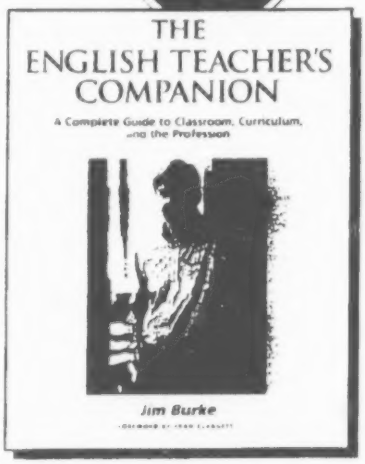


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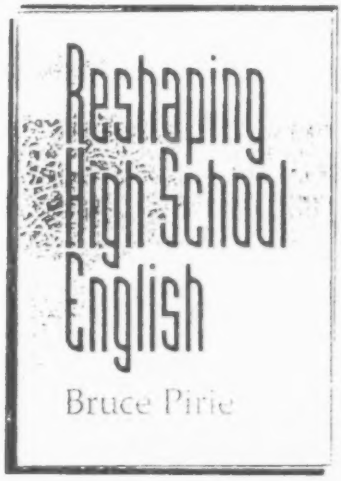


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# TEACHER TALK

## How Do You Handle Late Papers?

I have used an idea I read on this listserv (the NCTE-talk online discussion group) this year with success. I gave each student two late tickets. They may staple a late ticket to any work and turn it in as late as they want for full credit. A handful of kids used their late tickets on the first two assignments. The rest are hoarding them, saving them for a rainy day. This system works for me—they can turn in late assignments with no questions asked, and I don't hear excuses.

***Kelly Gleason***
***brainstormin@prodigy.net***

I agree with Kelly that giving kids a couple of "late tickets" is a great idea. By giving only a limited number of late tickets, we are not encouraging habitual procrastination but merely acknowledging that life is unpredictable.

I also make a distinction with my students between "due dates" and "deadlines." Things turned in after the "due date" suffer a late-penalty (unless they use a ticket). However, nothing can be turned in after a "deadline." The deadline defines the cutoff for late work.

I know our personal philosophies about how to teach kids responsibility vary with our personalities and teaching styles. I am a firm believer, however, in being reasonable while at the same time trying to teach good work habits.

If a home printer breaks down at a critical moment, I don't want a student to have to go to Kinko's in the middle of the night, and then sleep through my class the next day. It's not that big a deal if a student turns the assignment in a day or two late as long as this is not habitual behavior.

***Lind Williams***
***Lind@@provo.k12.ut.us***

I established that no late paper could receive a grade higher than a C, and, after several, I stopped talking about it. I let the system provide the cutoff. Thus, zeros were reserved for those who did not submit a paper within the quarter. This proved to be a very effective strategy.

***Ben Welsh***
***Bhwelsh@aol.com***

When students hand me late papers, as they are standing there, I write LATE on the top of it, and the date received. Then when I grade it, I write on it the grade it would have received had it been on time. I circle that grade with a diagonal line through it (international NO symbol) and then put the lowered-because-late grade beside it, with no other comment. This way the students see what they have done to themselves by turning the paper in late.

***Lisa Talcott***
***talva@worldnet.att.net***

I do accept late work, but with a hefty penalty. Our department policy is 10 points as Freshlings and Sophs, 20 points Junior, 30 points Senior, on major grades with decided due dates. Students learn early on that if they come to me quietly, with a valid reason for lateness, that I sometimes hedge on the due date. But I have to admit that I'm "big" on making them learn to manage their time and their stress.

***Edna Earney***
***ednae@tenet.edu***

I'm not the world's fastest paper-returner, and I often get behinder than it's decent to be. Were you to ask me for reasons, I could give you pretty good ones. That doesn't change the fact that the turnaround on kids' papers is too slow.

Now, were I able to keep up and meet "deadlines" well, I'd feel justified in demanding the same of my kids. But, circumstances being as they are, I don't feel like I can do that. Consequently, I don't have rigid standards about meeting deadlines unless kids have abused the work time I've given them in class. I document that well, so there's very little argument when I do penalize their lateness.

***Dorothy Sprenkel***
***sprenk@ruraltel.net***

Dorothy, thank you for reminding me that I'm not the only one who gets "behinder-than-it's-decent-to-be" with returning papers. I always thought I'd get better at this, but with over 20 years in the classroom, I'm finding that I still fall behind. Life continues to get more complicated. Something that helps me keep track of documenting student lateness is a date-stamper which I keep on my desk. It's easy to grab it and date stamp things as they come in, and I do it right in front of them so we're both witnesses to the date it arrived.

***Jan Bowman***
***tjbowman@surfshop.net***

I worried about losing students' late assignments until I started using my late folder. I have a large yellow plastic envelope-style folder. Inside I keep a neon pink sheet called Late Assignments. When someone has work to turn it, I take out the folder and they sign in the date, their name, the assignment, and the original due date. I stamp the ▶

date at the top and put the assignment in the envelope. Since I started doing this, I've never had a student say, "But I turned that assignment in. Did you lose it?"

***Mary-Sue Gardetto***
***gardetto@erinet.com***

My students and I together set the paper due dates to allow everyone a feeling of ownership. If the in-class checkpoints of the process indicate confusion, then we revise the schedule. On the final due date, the students hand me their papers personally and sign a paper indicating that they have turned them in. (I don't do this sign-in procedure for anything but the research paper.)

***Cindy Adams***
***cellen2@aol.com***

I just finished reading an article in March, 1999 *Teacher Magazine* titled "The Dog Ate My . . ." in the comment section by Coleen Armstrong. She explains how in her senior English classes she has eliminated due dates for papers. Her premise is that when a "teacher gets rid of deadlines, students run out of excuses and do their work"— a provocative "solution" perhaps for this problem. I liked the shift away from teacher to the student as responsible worker.

***Dianne Klein***
***dlklein@bgnet.bgsu.edu***

I have to tell ya, Diane, that if you use that approach, you will probably be seeing papers in June that you assigned in January. Eight years ago (and three principals), we bought into the Mastery Learning and OBE philosophies that all children can learn and that there are no real deadlines. Students receive many chances to rewrite/retest, and until they satisfactorily completed the assigned item/test, they would have a No Credit.

This resulted in some of the hardest work I have ever done. To make a long story short, teachers were up until midnight every night, and on weekends; one whole day was often spent working on those papers. No matter what we did, we still had many No Credits.

Then . . . the killer. This policy allowed the student to repeat the course the next semester to replace that NC. Follow this to its logical conclusion and you had ▶

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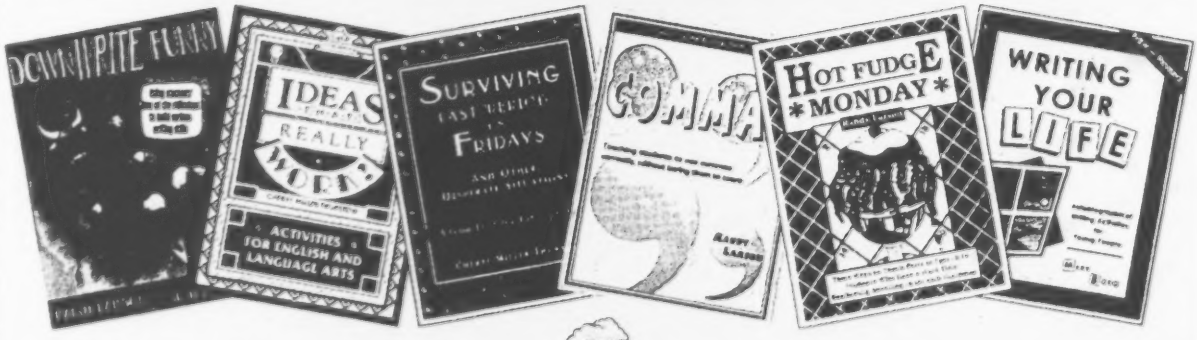


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burnt-out teachers and many students who dreaded writing. You also had seniors who were repeating freshman English. We valiantly tried this approach because we were mandated to do so, but we sure killed a lot of kids on writing. Things have changed now that we are all older and wiser. A deadline is important not only for your students but for you as well.

***Marcialyn Carter***
***mjcarter@lightspeed.net***

Two problems with eliminating due dates and consequences for missing them are:

1. Students NEED due dates or even the best fall behind. Last year one class convinced me to consider them mature enough to do their notes and writing of their final research papers without due dates. Not only did this plan fail (many students did not produce the kind of work they could have if they had been forced to stick to a schedule), in their final evaluations the students themselves all wrote that they needed due dates, even the driven self-starters. I need due dates as well, and young people need them even more.

2. More importantly, if one has planned a course that builds, that assumes that one skill is mastered before moving on to the next, then allowing kids to turn in late work slows the progress of the entire class. When we do this, we promote the idea that learning is "turning in assignments." Students never get the impression that we are moving toward a goal. I think enforcing due dates is the much kinder and more helpful approach to teaching, and the one students most appreciate in the end.

***Kathy Henderson***
***kathyh@lynnet.com***

Not only is enforcing due dates a kinder and more helpful approach, but to allow the idea that this is NOT good training for the real world is to promote a lie to students. There are a million-and-one ways that adults must learn to adhere to due dates in their lives. If school is a training ground for the real world, then we do students a great disservice by not expecting them to try to function according to reasonable due dates.

***Peggy Smith***
***PSmith@staff.chuh.org***

The problem with deadlines for school assignments as training for the real world is that school assignments are arbitrary, dictated at best by an arbitrary semester schedule. Deadlines in the real world are dictated by need for action. Miss deadlines and something important will be messed up: a grant lost, a sale lost, a project lost. Others will not be able to do their work. There are real consequences that are intimately woven into the work itself, the mission of the work.

Miss a deadline in school and the only thing at stake may be a grade, and if you don't care about that, there's nothing left to compel compliance. Even if you do care about grades, that's a poor reason to meet a deadline since it's detached from the purpose of the task. Hard and fast arbitrary deadlines are a weird way to teach kids responsibility, from my perspective.

***Eric Crump***
***eric@serv1.ncte.org***

Late papers don't exist in my classroom. Why? I don't have drop-dead deadlines. And, no, I don't think I'm nurturing irresponsibility. And, no, I don't think I'm creating lazy students. Heck, some of them were lazy when they got to me, and drop-dead deadlines aren't going to cure them.

My goal is to get my students more literate than when they came into my room. The work we do in my class is all designed to achieve that very broad goal. If I let kids off the hook by not accepting late papers, then I'd be shooting my goal in its metaphorical foot. If I gave students reduced credit, then I would be reinforcing a message that they may not be able to become more literate. In other words, I'd be giving them another excuse. I will accept late papers and I will give students full credit. It's the learning that is important.

***Nancy G. Patterson***
***patter@voyager.net***

The main reason that I persist in giving due dates is to help kids manage their own workloads. My own human tendency is to procrastinate and let work pile up. I know that lots of ▶

## TEACHER TALK

### SHAKESPEARE SET FREE

We have an energetic new teacher in our department and he will soon be starting *ROMEO AND JULIET* with three classes of reluctant ninth graders. Any ideas would be appreciated.

***Contributed to NCTE-talk.***

Buy *SHAKESPEARE SET FREE* edited by Peggy O'Brien (The Folger Library, 1993). The best resource I have ever seen in my 25 years of teaching Shakespeare, with concrete plans for teaching the plays in a dramatic way. Starting *ROMEO AND JULIET* with insults is just one example of a way of getting the students "on their feet" and involved with the play. This was created by teachers in the Folger Library's Teaching Shakespeare Institute, as part of a national humanities grant.

***Nancy Potter***
***pottern@belnet.bellevue.k12.wa.us***

kids are this way as well. By posting due dates, it helps kids spread out their work in a reasonable fashion.

However, I don't want to ever let a kid off the hook from doing the work and being rewarded for their effort, so the passing of a due date never closes off the possibility of turning in the work. I allow a certain number of penalty-free late assignments per term. Beyond that, they still get full credit for their late work, but for each late assignment beyond the penalty-free ones they lose "preparation points" from a separate grade for the term.

This way the grade I give for preparation and time-management is a completely separate issue unrelated to their academic score on the assignment. At the end of the term, a kid may have A's for all of their writing, but an F for their preparation grade if everything was turned in late. The preparation grade is just one score in the book added together to the other scores, roughly equivalent to one major assignment, but this score would represent less than 10% of the total grade for the term.

Accepting late work does mean an uneven workload and a few heavy nights at the end of the term, but it's worth it to me. Punctuality may be important, but it's not as important as literacy.

***Lind Williams***
***LindW@provo.k12.ut.us***

I must say (as a secondary ed student) I find this late paper debate rather interesting. Although I have read many responses that included concerns for student accountability and the development of responsibility as well as fairness to the teacher who has to read all of the papers, I have seen no mention of fairness to the students who work hard to turn in the assignments on time.

As a student who takes deadlines seriously, I have watched with dismay as fellow students turned in papers days and weeks late, only to receive the same grade as students (like myself!) who were responsible. What kind of message does such leniency send to the students who made sacrifices in order to buckle down and get the assignment done as requested?

***Caroline Sobczak***
***finecaroline@hotmail.com***

I tell my students that papers are due when they are due. If they come in on time, they will receive full credit. That full credit is just that: credit for turning it in on time. Each day after that loses points—10, 5, 3, depending on the value of the assignment. At 50% (which is an F) I no longer subtract points. In other words, they can turn it in until the end of the semester and they will still get 50% credit—if it is done correctly and appropriately—loose terms I have for rejecting work that is scribbled on a piece of paper before class.

I tell them that they can turn the assignment in as late as they want because I want them to do the work. I work exclusively in points with no grades and don't put a letter grade on writing until the end of the quarter when they choose what will be graded. So this system works well.

***Markie Johnson Uloth***
***mjuloth@ix.netcom.com***

On the other side of the coin, I had a student compliment me today because I keep deadlines—not because his work was due on a particular day, but that since I was so organized, he could count on me to have his grades up-to-date and to grade and return papers in a timely manner. He said that he appreciated that and that it was easier for students because they knew exactly where they stood.

***Pam Craig***
***PamelaSue5@aol.com***

To make it fair for students who turn in papers on time, I deduct 5% for each day the paper is late. After 10 days, the paper can be turned in for a full month for half credit—still an F but better than a zero. I write both the grade the paper would have received had it come in on time and the late grade.

***Kelley Paystrup***
***Kelley.Paystrup@Snow.edu***

Each of us has our own style. It seems to me we need to recognize this in ourselves as well as in our students and be willing to be flexible. Why should those teachers who prefer due dates be the only ones to compromise? Some students thrive on due dates and would find a class with none to be very disconcerting. Such a student might actually have trouble achieving in such a classroom.

Shouldn't teachers who don't give due dates take such students into consideration? It strikes me that a sensible policy would be any policy which has an element of flexibility and compromise in it. Above all, the expectations should be clear and consistent. Students can adjust to an awful lot if they know what to expect from any given teacher.

***Cindy Hoffman***
***ifdlh@imap2.asu.edu***

## TRACI'S LISTS OF TEN

*"Traci's Lists of Ten" are lists of thoughtful teaching tips created by Traci Gardner, a former English teacher and now Online Resources Manager for NCTE. To read more of Traci's Lists of Ten, visit www.daedalus.com/teach/tens.html.*

### Ten Ways to Write about Style

As a student, the idea of style made me nuts. I could understand details and specifics, a variety of structural patterns, ▶

comma splices, ways to use the colon. But style. I couldn't get a handle on it. It seemed thoroughly indefinable to me—nothing like the clarity of subject-verb agreement and persuasive arguments.

When I began teaching, I felt a sort of crawling in my stomach when I had to bring up issues of style in class. I guess because it seemed to me so hard to define when I was a student. Despite all the wonderful teachers who had explained it to me, I don't think I really "got it" until I was a junior or senior in college.

For this reason, I've devised a whole battery of class assignments that address style. Here are my top ten.

1. Choose a passage from the novel or short story that we're reading and translate it into another style. You can choose any style you want. You might choose a very formal style, a jargon-filled technical style, or persuasive, business writing style. You could even try the style of a children's picture book or a personal interest story in a newspaper. Whatever style you choose, be consistent through your entire translation. Use one style from beginning to end. Once you finish your translation, skip down a few lines and add a paragraph or so that explains how you made the decisions that you did as you were translating.

*Alternate Version:* Translate a fairy tale, folk tale, or fable that you've read into another style. Or get experimental, and have them write a rap version or an exaggerated and flowery version.

2. You undoubtedly use several styles in your day-to-day communication with people. Some are probably formal; others may be less formal, dialectical, or technical. Write a classification paper that organizes the styles that you use most often. To begin, jot down what you know about the styles that you use.

Next, look for connections—and differences. Which styles can you group in the same category? What sets the different categories apart? Write a paper that outlines the different classes of language that you use and defines specifically the ways that the language in each category is unique.

3. Choose three paragraphs from a story or novel (averaging at least 15 words per paragraph), and analyze the stylistic choices that the author has made. Start by taking some notes on the purpose of the passage. Summarize the passage, and outline its significance. Next, think about the way that the author has used style to make a point or emphasize a detail. What words or phrases are repeated? What sentence structures are used? How would you label the text—formal? informal? objective? chatty? Write a paper that analyzes the style that the author uses. Identify both the stylistic elements that the author uses and their relationship to the characters involved and/or to the main point of the story.

4. Write the same message in three different styles. Choose a short message—perhaps an invitation to a party, a description of a small object, a note announcing a new policy. Choose three different styles, and write the message in each of the three styles. You might choose a formal, informal, or objective style. You could choose a particular slang style, a business writing style, or a legal style. You could write the message using an active style, a passive style, or a natural blend of the two.

5. Write a paper which explains an English slang word or a jargon term that you know to a foreign exchange student or a friend from another country who is planning a visit to your home. Here is the situation: Your friend has been reading Web pages about the region where you live and found a slang word or jargon term which he or she didn't understand. Your friend sent you an e-mail message asking you to explain what the word means. For your paper, write the message you'd send to your friend. Explain what the slang word or phrase means and how it is used.

6. The word "style" is used to describe several kinds of expressions. Write a paper that explores a kind of style that *doesn't* involve word choice and sentence structure. You might outline the "rules" that apply to the style that you've chosen or compare/contrast two related styles (in the same way that you might compare formal and informal writing styles). You might describe the style of clothing that you wear. Or consider the stylistic flair of a particular athlete—think about the variety of styles of slam dunks and backhands. There's a wide range of options: hairstyles, musical styles, and so forth. Just choose a style that you're familiar with and write a paper that explores and explains that style.

7. Imitate the style of a passage. Choose a descriptive passage from one of the texts that we've been reading. Think about the stylistic choices that the author makes—what word ▶

## An Internet Version of the Shakespeare Scavenger Hunt

I was just cruising around the CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS Web site (www.ncte.org/notesplus) when I saw something that prompted a response. I did the "Shakespeare Scavenger Hunt" (CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS, August 1999) a little differently, and students were excited! I searched for and visited Web sites on the Globe, Shakespeare, and his plays, wrote down the URL's, and wrote questions for students to answer. My numbered handout listed URLs, and each was followed by the questions on that Web site. The students really got into it.

***Patricia Edmondson***
***patricia.edmondson@angelfire.com***

## Censorship Problem?

NCTE offers advice, helpful documents, and other support at no cost to K–12 teachers, schools, and districts that are faced with challenges to literary works, films and videos, or teaching methods. Leave a message at 800-369-6283, ext. 3848, or call Charles Suhor, NCTE/SLATE Field Representative, directly at 334-280-4758. You can also report a censorship incident via NCTE's Censorship Web site at www.ncte.org/censorship.

## Knopf Poetry Center Web Site

Give your students a hands-on introduction to contemporary poetry at the Knopf Poetry Center Web site (http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/poetry) , which features such poets as W. S. Merwin, Mark Strand, Philip Levine, and Sharon Olds. You'll find introductions, samples of their writing, and audio files. During National Poetry Month (April), watch for daily updates and interviews with the poets themselves.

## Study Holidays

For a brochure on Summer 2000 sessions of the popular English Literature Summer School programs, contact Avril and Arthur Meakin, 10 Victoria Road, Sheffield S10 2DL, United Kingdom. Telephone: (0114) 268-0766; Fax: (0114) 268-7921. E-mail: AvrilMeakin@netscape.net. Web site: www.webmarketing.co.uk/ess/.

Planned sessions include Millennial Irish Literature Summer School, July 29th–August 4; The Writer and the Environment, July 8–July 22; and North Wales Historic Walking Tours, May 6–13 and May 20–27. Early application recommended.

## Survey Request

I am conducting a survey in order to produce an educational music video. If you teach poetry and/or the works of Edgar Allen Poe, please contact me at gregrob@netfeed.com and I will mail you a short survey to fill out. Thank you. —Greg Robbins

choice and sentence structure has the writer used? Once you've analyzed the text that you're modeling your piece after, describe the view from your room's window or from a similar location imitating the style of the passage that you've chosen. Try to use similar word choice, sentence structure, and organization. Be sure to include a copy of the passage that you're using as your model when you submit your paper.

8. Choose an informative newspaper or magazine article that reports details on a recent event and rewrite the article as a personal interest story (or vice versa). The facts are the same whether you're writing a news story or a personal interest story—the difference is often the style: the ways that the story is structured, the specific words and phrases that are used, and the ways that the ideas come together in sentences. Think about the difference between the way that someone might be described. A news article might include a description such as "the 6'6" firefighter," while a personal interest story focusing on the same man might describe him as "the towering hero." Your rewrite should recast the words and sentences in the original to fit the style of the new version.

9. Your textbooks explain complex ideas and issues. Regardless of the subject matter, textbooks need to balance the technical jargon and style of the field being covered with explanations and details that make the ideas clear to someone new to the field. Analyze the style that is used in one of your textbooks. What kind of words are used? How often are technical terms included—and how are those terms presented? What kinds of sentences are used? What terms and structures are repeated? In your paper, outline the stylistic choices that the textbook's authors have made and explain how they help (or don't) make the material appropriate for readers.

10. Lewis Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky" adopts the style of an adventure tale but uses make-believe words to describe the events. Carroll mixes known and unknown words in phrases such as "vorpal blade." His sentence structure and syntax make sense even though the words that he's chosen are nonsensical. For this writing assignment, choose one of these options:

- Try your own hand at a "Jabberwocky" tale. Choose a model that you're familiar with and imitate the style for that model, telling a slightly nonsensical story as Carroll does. You don't need to stick with the romantic adventure that Carroll uses as his model—you might write a sports article, a personal interest story, a news article, or an advertisement. After you've written your "Jabberwocky," write a short reflection that identifies your model and explains the choices that you've made.

- Translate Carroll's tale into another style. What would the story have been if Carroll were writing a newspaper report or a technical report? How would the piece be different? Choose a style that makes sense for the story, and write a version of the events using that style. This assignment has two parts: translate the story into a new style, and write a paragraph that identifies the new style that you've chosen and that explains how you made your decisions as you were translating.

***Traci Gardner is NCTE Online Resources Manager.***

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# LETTERS

### *A Follow-up to "Silhouette Poems"*

I made copies of the article on "Silhouette Poems" (*CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS*, August 1999) for the three other eighth-grade English teachers in my school. We all did the project with fabulous results. In addition to discussing Mark Twain's quote, as suggested in the article, we also listened to, discussed, and wrote about Billy Joel's song "The Stranger." The parents loved seeing the "head poems" hanging from the ceiling on "back-to-school" night. Thanks for a wonderful idea.

***Gina Corsun***
***kengina@idt.net***

### *A Pleasant Surprise*

The most pleasant surprise of my summer as a participant in the Fulbright summer studies program in Malaysia occurred during a tour of the University of Malaysia in Sarawak.

As a group of us were walking through the library's stacks to see what publications were being read by students, one Islamic education major was reading an article I had written for *NOTES PLUS* in 1986 on an effective way to teach the business and friendly letter formats.

My point in relating this story is to tell writers that whenever they think a submission will probably never reach a reader beyond the United States, remember that even in the North China Sea on the island of Borneo, *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* is read. Your publication deserves applause.

***Kathy A. Megyeri, Sherwood High School,***
***Sandy Spring, Maryland***

## Notes

- The October 1999 issue of *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* included a recommendation (page 15) for the book *A CROW DOESN'T NEED A SHADOW: A GUIDE TO WRITING POETRY FROM NATURE* (Gibbs-Smith, 1994). This book is no longer available from NCTE; to order a copy, visit http://www.gibbs smith.com/catalog.html or call 800-547-9588.
- Bonnie Watkins's article "Parody Getting the Joke with Style," included in the August 1999 issue of *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS*, contained a reference to Phyllis McGinley's poem "Lament of the Normal Child." *TIMES THREE*, the volume of poems for which McGinley won the Pulitzer Prize in 1960, is out of print, but this poem can be found in the Scott Foresman textbook *U.S. IN LITERATURE*.
- Please note that, although all World Wide Web sites included in *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* are verified at the time the issue goes to press, such addresses are subject to frequent changes.

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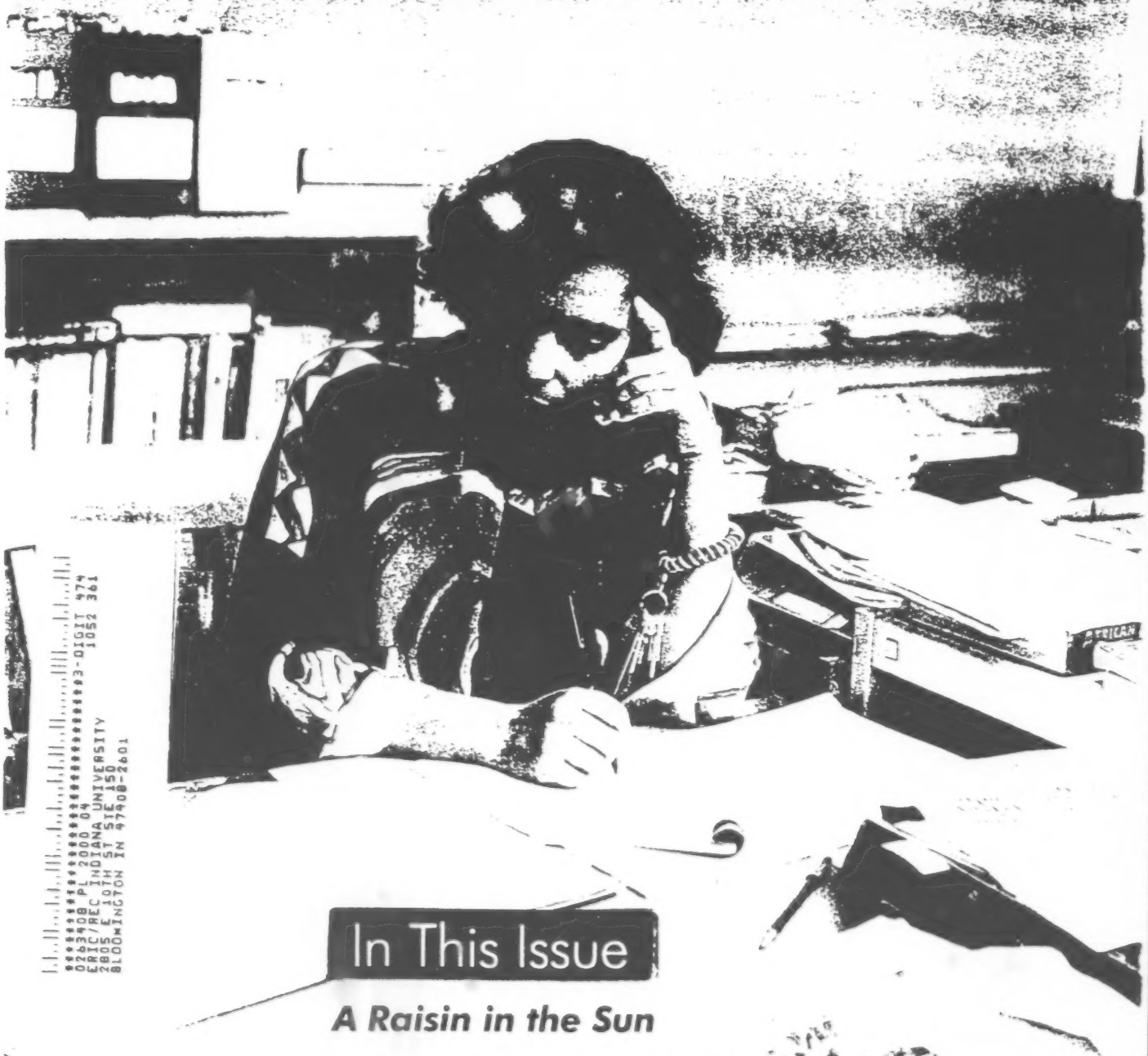

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## In This Issue

***A Raisin in the Sun***

**Focus on Literary Terms**

**How Do You Handle Extra Credit?**

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CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS

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To make your description as useful as possible to CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS readers, we suggest that you consider questions like these as you prepare your submission: What are the goals of the activity or classroom practice? What makes it especially meaningful for you and your students? How do you introduce this idea to students? In what ways do their interests and ideas help direct the course of this activity? What natural progression does this activity usually follow? How are students encouraged to reflect on their learning? How do you judge this practice to be effective? How would you change your implementation of it in the future?

Please submit double-spaced, typed copy. Receipt of your submission will be acknowledged by postcard, but acknowledgment does not guarantee publication. We are unable to return manuscripts, so please keep a copy. We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

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*Many of the e-mail contributions in this issue are reprinted from NCTE-talk, an electronic discussion group sponsored by NCTE. To read interesting discussions on a variety of topics related to secondary teaching, visit the NCTE-talk archives at http://www.ncte.org/lists/ncte-talk/achives.html or click on Site Map from the NCTE home page (www.ncte.org) and choose NCTE-talk Archives.*

*Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.*

—Malcolm X

Watch for additional *Tips* throughout this issue!

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# IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

This April issue includes a variety of teaching tips and suggestions for enhancing teaching and learning in the middle school and secondary classroom. A few are timely—there's a star-studded end-of-year activity in which students themselves are the stars, plus two features that capitalize on student interest in the Academy Award presentations.

Ideas that can be used anytime include a method for helping students achieve focus as they write research papers and an innovative strategy for use with *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*.

In other features, a lawyer-turned-English teacher describes how he uses his experience with words in the classroom, and a middle school teacher segues from working with students in a soup kitchen to talking and writing with them about their own "kitchen stories."

This spring issue also contains the index for the 1999–2000 publication year.

And if you're already looking ahead to the annual edition of *IDEAS PLUS*, it will be published this coming fall and is planned to reach *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* subscribers by mid-September, in time to help you make plans for the next school year.

## Star of the 21st Century

As the year ends, my Language Arts classroom becomes a stage, and my eighth graders become the stars!

One student, dressed in a shimmering leotard, performs a dance she choreographed, while another, wearing soccer attire, demonstrates some key moves. The future talk show host introduces famous women, including an astronaut, chef, and writer; the future mathematician explains a challenging problem at the blackboard. All students have the opportunity to share their unique talents with their classmates.

There are several reasons why I like ending the eighth grade year with this Star of the 21st Century assignment. It is a positive way to send my students from the cocoon of middle school to the larger high school environment. Despite their excitement at embarking upon this new adventure, many face the change with fears and insecurities. Star of the 21st Century reminds them that they are special. It encourages them to look at themselves and recognize the many wonderful qualities and skills they possess.

The assignment, which lasts about six weeks from introduction to final concert, involves both writing and performing. Students are first asked to create a fictional future star who is based upon themselves. One musical theater student, for example, created the fictional *Natalie Garland;* a dancer became *Liza Astaire;* and an athlete turned into *Mark Sosa*. Each week, using the same techniques as published authors, the students write about their character.

Authors often describe a character's appearance so the reader can visualize him. The first week, then, the students focus on appearance—what their star looks like and how the star dresses. Students are only limited by their imaginations and the realization that they must eventually come to school as that star!

Authors also develop a character through the world in which that person lives. Week two stresses setting, dealing with a favorite house, room, or place of the character.

Because we learn about characters from their words and ideas, week three is an interview. Four questions are asked: What is the most important issue of the new century and why? What is the message you try to convey through your work and personality? Who has most influenced you? The final question is left to the discretion of each student writer.

Authors also teach us about characters through their actions. The fourth writing assignment shows what the star does during his/her free time and how he/she treats fans.

Finally, authors let readers understand characters by what others say about them. In week five the students write five critics' appraisals of their star.

Each weekly writing is read and evaluated for focus, voice, descriptive language, and surface features. The five individual papers, including a brief paragraph summarizing the presentation (a dance, showing of art work, etc.), are compiled in a booklet whose cover has the name and picture of the star.

The concert is an exciting time. Students, individually or with partners, live or on video, introduce their star characters and then perform. All students, even the most reserved ones, are excited to participate because they have a deep ▶

## A Celebration of Women Writers

Here's an exciting Web site:

A Celebration of Women Writers
http://www.cs.cmu.edu/People/mmbt/women/writers.html

You can browse by author name, century, and country. Links are diverse and sometimes really wonderful—and by their nature suggest further readings/studies/activities. The site also promotes/facilitates the online availability of rare texts.

***Judith Angelo***
***adeba@en.com***

sense of connection with the character they have spent so many weeks bringing to life.

Whether giving a dramatic monologue from Shakespeare or simply explaining the game of golf, everyone feels comfortable. Classmates enthusiastically applaud and congratulate each other. I have even heard many students say that they never before knew a friend or classmate had such talent.

"Star of the 21st Century" does many things. It enables students to improve their writing skills while also giving them a greater understanding of how authors develop character. It shows them that they can stand before an audience and "perform." Most importantly, it gives eighth graders a stronger sense of self, of who they now are and of who they may become.

***Ronna L. Edelstein, Abbott Middle School, West Bloomfield, Michigan***

## Achieving Focus with a Research Paper Triangle

Often my students have trouble achieving focus in research paper assignments. This sometimes means that their early drafts (and sometimes final ones) are little more than a collection of information they have gathered and tried "to put in their own words, using quotations for support."

Working with writers one-on-one in our school's Learning Resource Center, I discovered a way to help students organize their thoughts. The Research Paper Triangle, shown on page 4, involves students in answering questions about ideas, audiences, sources and so on, before they begin writing. The graphic element helps students see how each question influences the others. I use this exercise with college students, but it could work just as well with younger writers.

While the questions can be answered and discussed in any order, one order seems to work particularly well in class settings. I have students first list potential research topics with which they have some personal connections and then list as many questions as they can think of about the topic. (Note: You may want to begin with a personal interest survey that will help students recognize what actually interests them.)

This semester some of my students, first-year college writers and adult students in a technical college developmental writing class, offered the following topics: "Diabetes," "Physician-Assisted Suicide," "Greek Mythology," and "Tupac Shukur," and the fairly global questions: "What are the causes of diabetes?" "Why doesn't the law stop physicians from killing patients?" "What did Greek mythology really mean?" and "Was Tupac killed because of jealousy?" Realize, of course, that each student has a list of questions, not just one. We addressed these questions and the rest of the Research Paper Triangle's questions/topics in class discussion and eventually revised all the questions into ones that the students are currently researching and writing about.

Here's an example of how the Triangle helped one student in planning a research paper on diabetes.

After brainstorming potential research topics and listing pertinent questions, K. J. answered all the Triangle questions—he wrote that he wanted to research the topic to find out more about diabetes because his mother was diabetic; he listed some questions about symptoms, care, treatment, and prognosis; the audience that could learn from his paper would be diabetics and their loved ones; his format would be an essay; and his purpose was to discover the causes of diabetes.

As soon as K. J. wrote down his purpose, he realized that his topic might be overly ambitious, but he only truly started to rethink the project when he considered the remaining question on the Triangle: What research do you ▶

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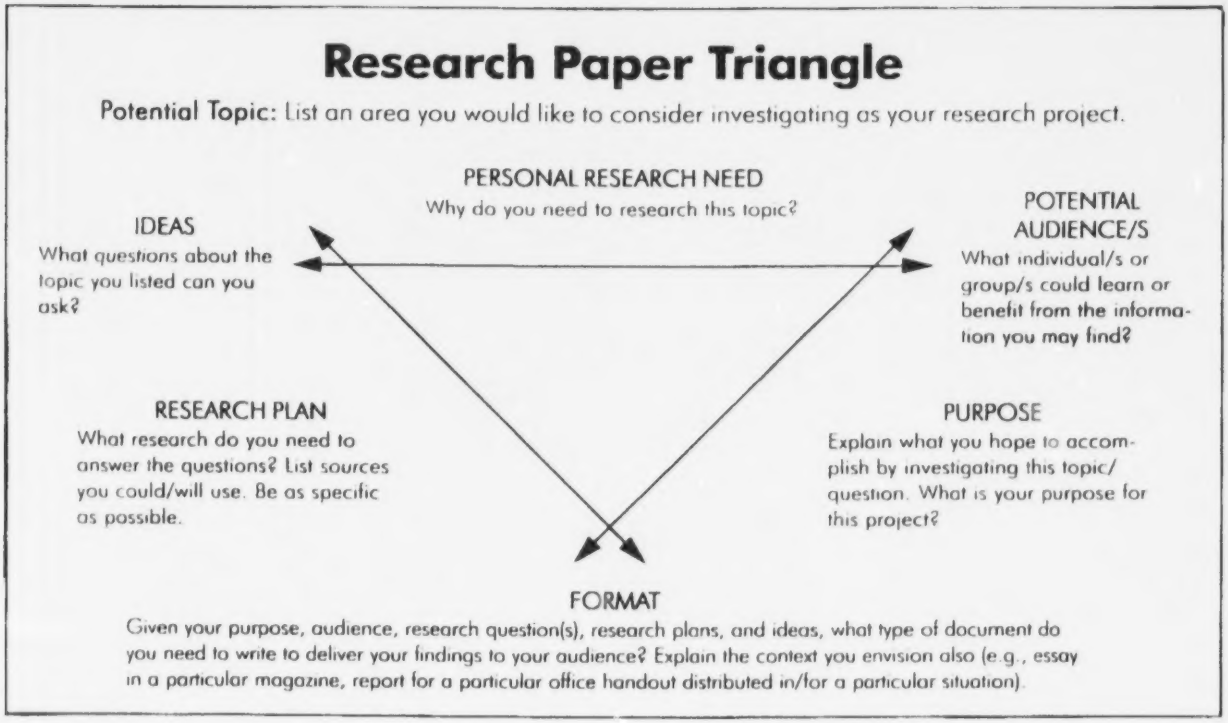
- advice and updates on censorship, plus a form for reporting censorship incidents **(www.ncte.org/censorship/)**
- Mobil Masterpiece Theatre's American Collection—a collaboration among NCTE, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Mobil Corporation, and WGBH Boston.

  Current offerings on the American Collection Site include resources for teaching Eudora Welty's THE PONDER HEART, a literary timeline, the American Writing Gateway, and a literary map of the U.S. **(www.ncteamericancollection.org)**


Research Paper Triangle
Potential Topic: List an area you would like to consider investigating as your research project.
PERSONAL RESEARCH NEED
Why do you need to research this topic?
IDEAS
What questions about the topic you listed can you ask?
POTENTIAL AUDIENCE/S
What individual/s or group/s could learn or benefit from the information you may find?
RESEARCH PLAN
What research do you need to answer the questions? List sources you could/will use. Be as specific as possible.
PURPOSE
Explain what you hope to accomplish by investigating this topic/question. What is your purpose for this project?
FORMAT
Given your purpose, audience, research question(s), research plans, and ideas, what type of document do you need to write to deliver your findings to your audience? Explain the context you envision also (e.g., essay in a particular magazine, report for a particular office handout distributed in/for a particular situation).

need to answer your questions? After some thought, K. J. decided that he would not be able to read the medical and scientific journals that he would want to read to fully understand and explain the cause for diabetes, so he returned to the Triangle to revise his plan. But that didn't mean he had to return to square one. He needed to decide on a more realistic purpose for his paper, but he still wanted to know more about diabetes for himself, and he also wanted to share what he would learn with others.

K. J. determined that he could focus his efforts by trying to discover what children of diabetics needed to know about living with a parent who has diabetes. He wrote up a new Triangle based on his new ideas. His new potential audience was individuals who had recently found themselves in such a situation; his new purpose was to help his selected readers/audience understand what to expect, now that their parent had been diagnosed with diabetes. As his format, he chose an informative pamphlet that he could offer to local medical offices and in our own Student Services office. As source material, he would look for general information written for a popular audience rather than for the scientific or medical community. He also decided to document his sources, satisfying a separate course requirement that students learn APA documentation.

K. J.'s research plan began first as a list of things he and group members felt he would want to present, such as information about potential seizures and how to handle such a situation, changes in diets, changes in family routines, needed medical checkups, and potential for children to inherit diabetes from their parents, but it became even more focused over time.

Although informative articles from the *EBSCO Sourcebook* (available in Indiana schools and public libraries) proved valuable, K. J. also realized that he needed to visit some local medical offices to ask about the need for the pamphlet he wanted to create. He decided that while he was there he would see if he could garner additional information to help answer his research question and its subparts.

This illustrates just one student's experience, but it shows how working with the Research Paper Triangle as a reference can help students stay focused and organized.

Whether students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups, they can use the information they've recorded on their Triangles as a guide as they continue through the steps of the research process.

As they choose sources, read background materials, take notes, draft their papers, edit them, and make final revisions, they are able to return to the notes and questions on their Triangle sheets to remind themselves of their audience, their purpose, the topic questions they wanted to answer, their original motivation, and the possible benefits they envision from their work.

***Kim Ballard, Ivy Tech State College, Lafayette, Indiana***

# TEACHER TALK

## A *RAISIN IN THE SUN*

Does anyone have any good ideas to share for teaching *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*?
***Contributed to NCTE-talk.***

I am getting ready to teach *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* to my eighth graders. Here is what I'm doing in my unit this year:

As we read the play, the students keep diaries as though they are characters in the play. (You can either assign them characters or let them choose—I often assign for more motivated classes to get a broader view, and let less motivated classes pick to try to allow them enough choice to buy into the assignment.) I require one diary entry per scene of the play, and I usually give a minimum length requirement of 4–5 pages.

As we read, I bring in snippets of video and music and readings that correlate to the events in the play. We read speeches by Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois to talk about assimilationism. The specific speeches are Booker T. Washington's "Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are" (p. 135) and W. E. B. DuBois' "No Cowards or Trucklers" (p. 148) from the book *A HISTORY IN THEIR OWN WORDS: THE BLACK AMERICANS* (Harper Collins, 1984) by Milton Meltzer. Both are fairly famous speeches; I'd imagine they could be found in any good anthology of African American historical pieces.

We also listen to jazz music, blues, and African drumming to get the gist of the conversations about music that are scattered throughout the play. Often we watch a scene from the movie (the 1989 American Playhouse version is super) and discuss cinematographic choices on the part of the director.

I also have access to some of the earlier drafts of the play (via articles and critiques of the play) and we talk about what Hansbury decided to leave in and cut out of her final version.

There are play excerpts in excellent essays in the book *HANSBURY'S DRAMA* (University of Illinois Press, 1991), edited by Steven R. Carter. Also, a book simply titled *Raisin*, edited by Robert Nemiroff and published by Samuel French in 1978, has additional essays and screenplay excerpts.

As a final "project," we read several essays dealing with feminism, racism, family matriarchs, men's rights, etc., and the students write essays in which they apply the hypothesis of one of the essays (their choice) to their character.

Again, the aspect of choice is key: the students choose which aspect of the play to focus on and they choose whether to agree or disagree with the essay's thesis as it applies to their character. (I have the students outline and use graphic organizers to be sure they understand the arguments in the essays after we've read them.)

I've taught *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* to 9th, 10th, 12th and now 8th graders. The only thing I vary is the complexity of the essays at the end and the stringency of the grading requirements on the various assignments. Students all seem to enjoy it, and they really get into the family issues aspect of the play—they can identify with having to balance one's desires with the needs of others in a family.

***Teresa Glenn***
***glenn@peedeeworld.net***

## The Living Word: Word Biographies in Vocabulary Study

I practiced law for 20 years before becoming a high school special education English and reading teacher. Thus, it's not surprising that I am fascinated by words. From *res ipsa loquitur* (literally, the thing speaks for itself) to metaphor and literacy, words have been the tools of both my trades.

Recently, reading Simon Winchester's excellent account of the writing of the *OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*, *THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN*, I began to think of words in a new way. I realized that words are like living beings and must be interpreted in the light of language and life today. You can think of the etymology of a word as its genealogy, its first use as its birth, its expanding and shifting meanings and usage as its ever-changing life, and the point at which it fades from use and becomes archaic as its death.

The commonly used term *word history* implies a series of events and causes occurring in the past. The term *word biography*, on the other hand, like the biography of a living person, would imply that a word still in use can continue to grow and change.

This would help us shift the emphasis of vocabulary study from static meanings to the idea that words are sym- ▶

bols in process, their meanings forever shading and transforming depending on the ways in which they are used.

Many elementary and most secondary students will be familiar with the concept of a biography. Transferring this concept to vocabulary study will give students a familiar structure to use in examining words, and introduce them to the fact that the meanings of words change over time. It should also help them understand that words do not spring fully grown from the loins of the gods, that they are born as they are coined and then grow and truly become part of the language only as they are used in writing and speech.

The works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens, for example, are written in a form of English, but to understand them today, many words must be translated into Modern English. Even words in these works which seem familiar often do not have the same meaning today as when they were used by the authors.

If we can show students the life of a word whose meaning today is very different from the time when it was used by such an author, we enable them not only to better understand and appreciate the nuances of the author's work, but also to better understand the nature of language itself.

In teaching students to construct a word biography, some useful questions to raise are:

1. When was the word born (first used)?
2. What is its genealogy (where did it come from, e.g., from another language, from slang, from literature, by combining, shrinking, acronym, etc.)?
3. What was its original meaning and how has that meaning changed over time? This could be done through research or by using words from class reading materials, along with passages in which the words are used in different ways.
4. Why was the word first coined and why has it continued to be used or fallen out of use? This is the highest level and most interesting question and will require students to use imagination and inference. The goal is to try to determine why there was a need or desire for the word, so that it was used by enough people to enable it to become part of the language. A few of the possible reasons are style, onomatopoeia, more precise meaning, lack of a synonym, new concept or invention, and vivid imagery.

Here are two examples of the application of this structure:

**Word:** *colossal*

a) Birth: 1712 (according to Webster's)

b) Genealogy: from the Greek word *kolossos*, meaning a statue of gigantic proportions.

c) The original meaning, still in use, was "resembling a statue of gigantic proportions" but it has been expanded to mean "of stupendous size or power," and then to "of exceptional or astonishing degree."

d) The word probably became popular, despite the availability of close synonyms like *gigantic* and *enormous*, because of the vivid image of the Colossus at Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was a statue of Helios, the Greek sun god, astride the entrance to the harbor, pictured by legend as being of such huge proportions that ships could pass through its legs.

**Word:** *nerd*

a) Birth: 1950

b) Genealogy: from the Dr. Seuss book, *If I Ran the Zoo*

"And then, just to show them, I'll sail
to Ka-Troo
And
Bring
Back
an It-Kutch
a Preep
and a Proo
a Nerkle
a Nerd
and a Seersucker, too!"

c) In the book, a nerd was a clumsy and socially inept creature. It was then applied to a person with those characteristics, and has since come to be most often applied to a person slavishly devoted to academic pursuits or the use of the computer.

d) I would infer that teenagers felt a social need for a word to classify and distance themselves from unpopular peers, and that this particular word was adopted for reasons of onomatopoeia and style.

Using the familiar concept of a biography gives students a familiar structure, helps them understand how etymology, sound, appearance, and usage all combine to produce a word's meaning, and shows them that word meanings evolve and change over time. Just as a child is very different from the person he or she becomes as an adult, so a word may have many meanings over its life. And just as a

## Lesson Plans on *The New York Times* Site

I just came across a site with some wonderful lesson plans. Go to nytimes.com and access the archives (you'll have to sign in but it's free). The address is www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/languagearts.html. For example, two deal with using the films *Antz* and *Tarzan* to teach point of view. Most deal with relevant topics of the day. A great resource!

***Karin Hamburg***
***ACHIAS@worldnet.att.net***

person assumes many different roles at work, at home, at play, so a word may have very different meanings depending on its context. The concept of a *word biography* can help show students that the lives of words are often fascinating and complex, and well worthy of our attention and study.

***Andrew Allen, Splendora High School, Splendora, Texas***

# FOCUS ON STORYTELLING

## Kitchen Stories

When I found myself working side by side with my middle school students in a soup kitchen preparing weekend dinners, the students and I started swapping kitchen stories. The stories focused on meals prepared, conversations during those meal preparation times, and family memories focused on food, eating, and cultural culinary practices.

Though the original focus for our community service effort was the serving of meals to the homeless and socializing with the individuals who ate at the soup kitchen, the students' reflective journals of their experiences began including the separate kitchen stories we shared.

I decided to take this idea back to my classroom and explore its potential for conversation, reflection, personal narratives, and research.

I began by sharing samples of the student stories recorded by my community service team members (the student team members gave their approval) and also included my own kitchen tale of a grease- and fat-driven late fifties/early sixties girlhood.

In addition, I decided to share the opening of *MIRIAM'S KITCHEN,* a very accessible book whose author, Elizabeth Ehrlich, had spoken at a New York City Association of Teachers of English meeting to an audience of student writers and teachers.

Elizabeth's book had grown out of a year spent sitting and talking in the kitchen of her mother-in-law Miriam, a Holocaust survivor, as Elizabeth struggled with her desire to write a novel. Ironically, as a result of her unplanned conversations with Miriam, Elizabeth wound up with a book she titled a memoir.

Most of Elizabeth and Miriam's conversations had occurred on and around Jewish holidays; Elizabeth structured her book to follow the calendar months of the Jewish Year (which begins in September) with reflections on the holidays, Jewish History and Culture, and finally, recipes for the dishes Miriam made as the conversations took place.

As I selected excerpts from Elizabeth's memoir to read aloud, I was a bit concerned about the extent to which my students—most of whom are Latino and African American—would identify with a thirty-something, Jewish, Caucasian woman in search of her identity. But I was hopeful that Elizabeth's reflections on honey cake, cholent, mandel brout, chicken soup, noodle kugel, and potato pudding would inspire students to craft their own food-and kitchen-focused memoirs and oral histories, and that the power and the universality of Elizabeth's responses to her shared kitchen conversations would strike a resonant chord in my students' experiences.

One of my students read aloud the Introduction section (xi–xiii) of *MIRIAM'S KITCHEN.* For this initial reading, I requested that the student deliberately leave out all specific religious, geographic, ethnic, and cultural references.

▶

# Classroom Solutions

## Attention-Getting Signals

As I begin my first year of teaching, I'm looking for some attention-getting signals I can use when necessary.

***Summer Stephens***
***ESSTEP@aol.com***

Favorite Attention-getting Signals

1. A harmonica: It's perfect for when students are working independently and the conferencing noise gets to be a bit high. Blow a continuous soft note and seconds later, the room is at a soft murmur again.
2. A gourd rattle with rice or beans in it. Works well for the above-mentioned situation.
3. Hats or fun costumes. I wear hats for different activities. Read-alouds (Dr. Seuss hat), Conferencing (Don't interrupt, I'm-talking-to-someone hat), art (Picasso hat), fire drills (Fire Chief hat), and so on. So much fun.

Be creative!

***Tina DiChiara***
***mwideawake@hotmail.com***

As a prompt to focus students' listening, I invited them to draw kitchens, persons, images, and foods evoked by the words. I also asked them to try to find and write about their own interior resonant chord, *echoing* (a word I often use in class) the personal Ehrlich narrative.

As the students listened to Elizabeth's evocative prose, even with purposely omitted religious and cultural references, they were stirred. Here are a few examples of passages they enjoyed:

> "My grandmother used to sit before her stove on a tall, four-legged stool, stirring cabbage soup in a white enamel pot, dishing out salty perceptions of life." (xi)
>
> "My grandmother's blue and white tiled kitchen, in which so much of life had been lived, was her truest sphere. There she handed down traditions brought from the Old World and translated amidst the exigencies of the New. Much of my value learning took place in that kitchen." (xi)
>
> "I remembered and unwrapped a bundle of family tales, many located in or near the kitchen." (xi)
>
> "When I am with Miriam in the kitchen, she speaks of the past. I listen, trying to imagine the world from which her cuisine came."(xii)
>
> "I choose my own history, deciding which snapshots, decades, recipes, versions of arguments and events are to be discarded, and which will stand for the whole." (xii–xiii)
>
> "I inventory layers of translucent recollection, evolving food, love, home, apocrypha, anger, ritual, laughter and regret. The result is a collage, but also a way of life." (xiii)

Many students half closed their eyes and sat contemplatively. Some smiled. Others began sketching. From broad pen and marker strokes, images of family members, pots, pans, dishes, tables, chopping boards, stools, ladles emerged. Some began writing.

We opened discussion. Several students simply stood up and displayed their sketches. They shared details of clay pots, enamel pots, aromas of soup boiling, meat roasting, and fish frying. Some told tales of secret ingredients and their joy in sharing the meal preparation tasks.

The classroom sharing illustrated wide variety in the amount and type of cooking done in the home, but it wasn't until I read the extended writings done outside class that I learned that three students came from households where literally no cooking was done. One of the students had been briefly housed at a shelter for battered women with his mother; he wrote (for my eyes only) about his mother using a hidden—and forbidden—hot plate to prepare fruit oatmeal for him on his birthday. Elizabeth's conversations with Miriam had stirred his memory of his African American mother's childhood love of oatmeal mixed with peaches from South Carolina.

I was astonished when one of my usually reticent students went up to the blackboard and wrote a recipe for vegetable cous cous and french onion soup on the board. She told about her great aunt's recipe book which held a place of honor in her family's china cabinet. Her mother was teaching her to cook from it recipe by recipe. The student intended to start her own recipe book for her future children to use.

▶

## TEACHER TALK

### American Authors of Chinese and Japanese Ancestry

Can you suggest works of literature by contemporary American authors of Chinese and Japanese ancestry? My students are looking for some examples in conjunction with a research project focusing on immigration.

***Contributed to NCTE-talk.***

Here are some suggested authors, many of whose stories are grounded in the contradictions of immigrant life:

Gail Tsukiyama
*WOMEN OF THE SILK* (about Chinese factory workers)
*THE SAMURAI'S GARDEN* (about a young Chinese man living in Japan just before World War II, at the time the Japanese army was overrunning China. This book is written in diary form so it should be easy to find suitable excerpts.)

Gus Lee
*CHINA BOY* (about "growing up American" on the streets around San Francisco's Panhandle)

Yoshiko Uchida
*PICTURE BRIDE* (about the lives of Japanese immigrant women whose arranged marriages brought them to America before WW II)
*JOURNEY HOME* (young adult book about starting over in Oakland after being interned during the war)
*JOURNEY TO TOPAZ* (about life in the internment camp)

***George Sheridan***
***gsheridan@bomusd.edcoe.k12.ca.us***

When class discussion moved to Miriam's cultural heritage, no one in the class guessed that Miriam was Jewish Caucasian. Many students guessed that she was from the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico, where a majority of the students' families had come from. Indeed, mentions of Miriam, of Elizabeth's own grandmother, and of their immigrant experiences and serious cooking evoked stories of students' own Aunt Nilda, Uncle Rafael, Grandma Levinia, Abuela Marisol, Cousin Bessa, Lady Barbara, Miss Latoya, and Daddy Darius. We shared tales of wego bread (a Dominican Republic version of challah with fennel), dominican cake (a vanilla cake with raisins), guava pie, chitlins, grits, and more.

As the end of the period approached far too quickly, one of my students said she knew her great aunt had a wonderful cooking story. Indeed, she had never thought to get it down on paper, but now she wanted to call her aunt and go visit her in her kitchen.

I quickly suggested to the students that if they too wanted to go further with this investigation, they could interview family or friends (or look at photographs and pictures of food-related scenes) and draw or write "kitchen stories" or other tales relating to food. I asked that students interested in this optional project have their work ready to share in a week.

Imagine my surprise when, a week later, almost half the class contributed to our "kitchen story cooking" collection drive!

Among the varied responses were the following:

Recipes combined with family photos of the dish, samples of some dishes, and recipe card/book pages.

Kitchen Stories: some tape recorded, some fictionally retold with illustrations/photos/graphics, one videotaped kitchen story conversation.

Kitchen Art: drawings of present and remembered kitchens with descriptive and reflective memories.

Menus: from family weddings, brunches, graduations, and favorite restaurants.

### *A Kitchen Story Sampler from Our Classroom*

When I think of a kitchen memory, I quickly transform to New York and I am a four-year-old child sitting with my great aunt and uncle. They sit at a large Formica table still moist from being cleaned after the dinner plates are cleared. It is still light out and the window faces other windows and other lives stirring in the courtyard.

There is no poignant smell or delicious recipe that I vividly taste. It is just a vision of my aunt and uncle sitting quietly, peeling oranges and grapefruits. I sneak my small fingers for a piece and squish it in my mouth without a sound.

My aunt smiles and winks and wipes her hands against her apron. The sky grows dark and the voices subside, but the heat stays on like syrup. We are together eating the fruit in the kitchen like any summer night. It is our simple routine.

—Kerry

Looking back on my memories of being in the kitchen is actually funny for me. Of course I can smell my mom's great tomato sauce brewing and her famous birthday cakes baking in the oven, but most of my memories are of negative feelings.

Growing up I was not what you called a "normal eater." I didn't like anything on the table. I vividly remember times when I was forced to sit at the kitchen table until I ate my pasta with sauce. Thank goodness for my little dog, or else I would probably still be sitting there today.

—Michelle

My mother's kitchen was a virtual minefield of fat-loaded delicacies. How I relished the basted, roasted chicken with its special backside and wishbone. Indeed, I would sit by the broiler and await the browning of the bird. I loved helping mother make chicken salad from the leftover chicken bits or cooking up chicken soup with matzah balls. While I was never a chicken soup drinker, I loved it for its ease at enfolding me into the circle of Shabbos meal preparers.

—Rose Reissman

Based on the initial response to the Kitchen Story project, which we also call Culinary Collaging, we've developed the following continuing strands/activities:

Kitchen Story and Poetry Samplers: to provoke discussion and evoke personal/oral history memory tales.

Kitchen Art and Design: traveling museum exhibits including all the art, photos, and advertisements of kitchens/food we collect. ▶

## Reading Rants

Teri Lesesne referred me to a great site called "Reading Rants" made up of reviews of YA lit for older teens. The reviews are by a YA librarian in New York, and each has a strong, engaging voice with meaty details about the books (which are divided into several thematic collections). This is an excellent resource for those who're looking to enliven class libraries for the new year. It would also be a good link for high school readers to pursue on their own.

http://tln.lib.mi.us/~amutch/jen/

***Gloria Pipkin***
***gpipkin@i-1.net***

Kitchen Art Online: An electronic gallery on our school Web site with guestbook.

An evolving multigenerational kitchen-themed or food-focused classroom bookshelf, containing some of the following:

*EVERYBODY BAKES BREAD* by Norah Dooley. Illustrations by Peter J. Thornton. (Carol Rhode Books, 1996)

*MIRIAM'S KITCHEN* by Elizabeth Ehrlich. (Penguin Press, 1997)

*HOW MY PARENTS LEARNED TO EAT* by Ina R. Friedman. (Houghton Mifflin, 1984)

*LOVE AS STRONG AS HUNGER* by Lenore Look. Illustrated by Stephen Johnson. (Atheneum, 1999) (Ages 5–9)

*A GOOD SOUP ATTRACTS CHAIRS—A FIRST AFRICAN COOKBOOK FOR AMERICAN KIDS* by Fran Osseo-Asare. (Pelican Publishing, 1993) (12 & Up)

*DUMPLING SOUP* by Jama Kim Ruffigan. (Little, Brown and Company, 1993) (Ages 5–9)

*IN THE NIGHT KITCHEN* by Maurice Sendak. (Harper Collins, 1970) (Ages 5–9)

*FANNY AT CHEZ PARISSE: A CHILD'S RESTAURANT ADVENTURES* by Alice Waters. (Harper Collins, 1992) (12 & Up)

***Rose Reissman, New York, New York***

*Tips*

## Using Media Images in the Classroom

*This excerpt is reprinted with permission from a conversation with Carlos Cortes that appeared in TEACHING TOLERANCE (Fall 1999). Visit the TEACHING TOLERANCE Web page at http://www.splcenter.org/teachingtolerance/tt-index.html.*

*As the son of a Mexican Catholic immigrant father and an Austro-Russian Jewish mother, Carlos Cortes grew up witnessing the interaction between different cultures right in his own home. He credits this early experience with setting the course for his 30-year professional study of racial and ethnic diversity in the United States.*

*Cortes is a widely published author and popular lecturer on multicultural issues; his newest book, forthcoming from Teachers College Press in 2000, is titled* HOW THE MEDIA TEACH ABOUT DIVERSITY: MASS MEDIA AS MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION.

**Can you give some examples of how a teacher might use media images—negative or positive—constructively in the classroom?**

Let's say as a part of *education*, as opposed to just in the classroom. I think it's more important to have students weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the media treatment of diversity, the contributions of the media to intergroup understanding or misunderstanding, than to have the teacher didactically assert, "This image is positive, this is negative." I try and keep students and teachers from simply talking about positive and negative because I think that ignores the nuances and complexity of the issue. It leads to trying to put every media treatment into one of those two categories—good and evil—which is a very American tendency.

I tell teachers, "Whatever you do, don't assign kids to go out and *look* for stereotypes, because then you've already given them the answer: 'You will find stereotypes.' Then every time they see an image or a depiction, they'll be likely to assume it's a stereotype." But if you have students look for *patterns*, then they can discover for themselves: "Aha! This looks like a pattern. We're not yet sure if it's a stereotype, but let's look further."

Concrete assignments work best. You could have students select one particular radio talk-show host and listen to the program regularly over a two-week period to determine if there's a pattern of treatment that the host uses when discussing members of a particular group.

I might say, "Collect all articles about women in two daily newspapers over a two-week period to determine if there's a pattern of the kinds of stories that they run. Watch TV news over a period of time to discover whether there's a pattern of treatment of religion. Make a list of the religious stories on the news and see if there's a pattern. Collect movie reviews for one month to see if there's a pattern of movies about a specific group. Is there a series of themes that continually come through?"

This is fairly straightforward. By identifying patterns, students can come to their own conclusions about what the media are teaching and the kinds of possible stereotypes they should be aware of when they're reading or viewing media throughout their lives. This also reinforces the lesson that they're going to be lifelong learners about diversity through the media.

# TEACHER TALK

## How Do You Handle Extra Credit?

This year, I began using a different approach to extra credit that seems to work very well. It's a borrowed idea from a workshop that I went to.

At the beginning of the year, I give each student an index card with his or her name on it. I use different colors for different classes.

This is their bonus card. They are responsible for keeping track of it. During the year I give different assignments for bonus work. Sometimes I use a project in conjunction with something we are reading and sometimes I use entries for writing competitions.

When a student turns in a bonus assignment, I grade it and put the points on the card. When grades are almost due, each student is allowed to use only 30 bonus points. If they have done no assignments or if they have lost their card, they're out of luck. Also, if a student doesn't need bonus points, they can hold them until they do. It is a wonderful system. It teaches responsibility. Students don't ask for bonus work, and they don't try to haggle over their grades.

***Kristy McLemore***
***jkmclem@asbank.com***

We all do what works best for us. I just don't give extra credit—period. Usually it's at the end of a marking period, requested by students who want to raise their grade because of negligence or by those who are extremely competitive and want the highest scores possible. Feeding that kind of frenzy, in my humble opinion, is counterproductive and a mite unhealthy. The students seldom protest when I tell them that they have enough work in the course to keep them busy and challenged, and I prefer that they attend to the regular course work to get the maximum from it. No one so far has complained.

***Kate Murax***

At the beginning of each school year, I post four dates that are the cut-off dates for turning in extra-credit work—one in each grading period. I hand out requirements and limitations for extra credit essays, and encourage kids to put a few essays in the bank, so to speak. What they can't do is wait to see if they need extra credit before they write it.

When a student has completed all work (even corrections and re-corrections) and still has a grade lower than it should be, I'll add in some of the extra credit, which I've graded as I do all essays. I won't count more than four per nine weeks (for an individual student) and it can't bring the grade higher than one letter above where it was, originally.

I don't get a lot of takers on this offer, but every year about five people write three or four essays apiece, just in case. Most of the time, they never need them. Ain't that just the way!?

***Dorothy Sprenkel***
***sprenk@ruraltel.net***

I rarely give straight out purely extra credit assignments, mainly because I find the quality of that assignment is usually pretty poor and rushed through, not to mention the message that giving extra credit sends.

However, I do give quite a bit of extra credit that is built in to already existing assignments. For instance, "do questions 1–10 and, for extra credit, do this extra portion." Or "write this poem and, if you illustrate it with symbolic items from the poem, you'll receive extra credit." Students who slack off usually don't do the assignment in the first place, let alone the extra credit. I then keep a log of all the times I've offered extra credit for end-of-the-semester parent conferences. It's come in handy many times!

I also give some extra points anytime students "wow" me on assignments, particularly for struggling students who try hard, whose effort was an "A" but whose work was lacking. I'm known for often saying, "Wow me."

***Connie Howell***
***MsHSTeach@aol.com***

A college professor once told us (when asked if she gave extra credit), "If you can't do the work I assigned in the first place, why would I give you more?"

I do offer extra cultural credit for students who go see plays, art exhibits, and so on, and sometimes I give bonus credit by letting students rewrite their lowest essay score.

I tell them that I don't care about their grades, I care about their learning. But I acknowledge that they care about their grades and these are ways for them to do both.

***Lisa St. John***
***Lily83165@aol.com***

I only make extra credit available for students who have turned in ALL their assignments. So even if a student can only receive half credit for turning in an assignment very late, it's worth it to them to turn it in anyway so that they ▶

can qualify to earn extra credit. This works for me and all of my students seem to think it's fair.

***Kelley Paystrup***
***Kelley.Paystrup@Snow.edu***

My policy on extra credit is simple: you must have enough regular credit before you qualify for extra credit. I only permit students with a passing average to do any extra credit.

I do make one exception. If a student has handed in every assignment (or not missed more than two), he or she may do "something" to make up for low scores. The catch is that I ask the student to write a proposal and we agree on the point value. As a result, only serious students ask for extra credit. I tell them the policy on the first day of school. Most complain, but they accept it.

***Jason Grear***
***TheBard22@aol.com***

## A "Novel" Academy Awards Ceremony

"The nominees for the "Best Choice Novel" are:
*Lostman's River*—Historical Fiction
*Wringer*—Realistic Fiction
*Maniac McGee*—Realistic Fiction
*The Devil's Arithmetic*— Holocaust Fiction
*Tuck Everlasting*—Fantasy, Other Places and Times

. . . and the winner is *Wringer*, for a gripping account of having to grow up and make decisions, even when you don't want to."

Eric, a soon-to-be sixth grade graduate, stands dressed in black and white at the front of the computer lab. It is his turn to be "presenter" and he clicks the mouse on the computer projector. Slides accompanied by music, graphics, and sound effects—such as applause—are precision timed to appear on the screen. We, the audience of this Academy Novel Award Ceremony, sit back and enjoy the show.

A few years ago, my teaching partner and I were searching for a culminating book report to be done during the last few weeks of school. Going to our best sources, other teachers, we came up with the idea to have an awards ceremony for the books read during the school year.

Students were to select two different categories, such as "Best Novel," "Best Ending," "Best Leading Character," "Best Supporting Character," "Best Conflict," and so on. A tangible award designating the category and the winner's name was to be designed; we encouraged students to use their imagination.

On the day of the actual awards ceremony, students came dressed in "formal" black and white attire. As students presented the individual awards, they gave a personal reason why this choice deserved such credit.

The actual awards ranged from computer-generated certificates to gold spray-painted drama masks, recycled sports trophies to old paperback books spray-painted and mounted on a stand. One student even created her version of "Oscar."

My partner and I brought cameras that day to capture many "Kodak moments" for the bulletin board. Needless to say, not only did the students enjoy the respite from uniforms, but during those last days of May this was a welcome activity to declare their favorite reads of the year.

During the following summer, as my partner and I began mapping out our next year, the Academy Novel Awards was a keeper. Looking at our budding curriculum, we discovered the need to offer opportunities to implement technology into our program. Questioning where this facet could be included, the idea evolved to add Power Point presentations.

Meeting with our computer guru, we discovered our idea would work because all sixth graders would be exposed to the aspects of the Power Point program during their required computer classes that year. We entrusted the training to her skill and the students' fertile minds.

May fast approached as the assignment was given to the students. Each student would create a Power Point presentation, using the class core and choice novels covered during the school year. The requirements were simple:

Include a minimum of 5 slides, maximum 9 slides.

Select three different categories (at least one character, one book award).

Give nominees, winner, and the reason for your choice in each category.

Enhance slides with music, graphics, sound effects, etc. Downloading from the network is encouraged.

Dress in black and/or white on day of presentations. This is a formal occasion!

During the following weeks, the computer lab was booked for class times, students asked for passes during lunch, and numerous zip-drive discs were purchased for work to go between school and home.

Excitement buzzed in the discovery of Web sites, downloading of music, and cooperative sharing of suggestions between peers. The beauty of this project began to reveal itself as my students immersed themselves in the creative process. They were in complete charge of their product. I must add, with students' expertise I often found myself in the role of learner, not teacher. Finally the big day arrived with the students dressed in their finery.

Reveling in the excitement of the final creations, we, the audience, sat back and enjoyed the show.

***Beverly Martin, Houston, Texas***

## Classroom Solutions

### Creating Anticipation

When I know student attitude is declining I pull a few tricks. For example, groans were heard when I announced we were beginning Shakespeare. So a few days before I was to start the unit, I half-mumbled, "I'm not sure if I'm going to teach MACBETH this year. I don't think you are quite ready for it."

"Ready?" they say as their feathers begin to ruffle. "What do you mean?"

"I think it may be too much for you to handle, you know. . . the gory stuff. . . at your age. . . Oh well!" I sigh.

I time this right at dismissal and end with a "See you tomorrow!"

The next day, I'm swamped with students saying, "Aw come on, Mrs. Pfeifer! Do yo' think we're babies or something? When do we get to start MACBETH?" Timing is the key.

Anticipation can be a powerful tool if you know how to use it. I also use boxes, sacks, etc. with one word or a huge red question mark drawn on them, [and containing a prop pertinent to our reading.]

Kids are naturally curious, so I set the containers in a somewhat obvious place for a few days prior to an activity I've planned. The contents don't have to be something unusual or special. Curiosity is enough—students are never disappointed.

***Kim Pfeifer***
***kimp@ruraltel.net***

## TRACI'S LISTS OF TEN

*"Traci's Lists of Ten" are lists of thoughtful teaching tips created by Traci Gardner, a former English teacher and now Online Resources Manager for NCTE. To read more of Traci's Lists of Ten, visit http://www.ncte.org/traci/tens.*

### Ten Award Competition Activities (Plus FIVE!)

This List of Ten is a bit different. In my thinking of the hoopla over the Academy Awards, I began wondering what would happen if instead of movies, we were talking about works of literature. So I've come up with an Oscar-type competition for the readings that a class has completed over the course of a school term.

Some of the items in the competition can be separated by gender, as the Academy Awards are separated. I've listed them as different categories, but you could collapse the categories. You could consider, for example, all characters rather than best male and best female. Likewise, while there are questions here for different genres, all the questions could be collapsed into a single question on the most outstanding piece of literature (rather than the best poem, the best play, and so on).

There are two different ways to use these suggestions. Either way, it probably works best as an end-of-the-term activity.

*Option One:* You might have an actual contest. Students could assemble in small groups to go through their readings for the semester or the year, searching for nominations. You might ask students to write objective support for their nominations and to include the equivalent of "film clips"—passages that show the strength of their nominations. The questions in the assignments could guide groups of students gathering the nominations for a particular category. Once all the nominations are in place, you might have some time for campaigning, and eventually your students could vote. This assignment could work across classes if different sections have done the same readings.

*Option Two:* Choose one of the questions and use it as an exam prompt or a final paper. To help students, you might name five candidates for them to choose among. By listing choices, you can help students avoid freezing and wasting time trying to think of appropriate candidates, letting them focus on making a choice and providing supporting details.

*Note:* Since the items are a bit redundant, I've rounded ▶

this list up to 15 items. The extra five give me the chance to explain related options (such as best play, poem, novel, and short story) while still including everything that I wanted to have on the list.

*Guidelines for the Writing Assignment:* All 15 activities conclude with a writing assignment in which students explain their selection, support their choice, and include comparisons. Rather than repeating the guidelines 15 times, I'm including those student instructions here:

> Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the _____ (male character, female character, setting, etc.) that you've chosen really does stand out.

### *Activities*

1. **[Outstanding Character—Male]** Who was the most outstanding male character in the literature that we've read this term?

Your choice should be a main character in any work that we've read. Think carefully about how the character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a male character "outstanding."

2. **[Outstanding Character—Female]** Who was the most outstanding female character in the literature that we've read this term?

Your choice should be a main character in any work that we've read. Think carefully about how the character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a female character "outstanding."

3. **[Supporting Character—Male]** Who was the most outstanding male supporting character in the literature that we've read this term?

Your choice should be a supporting character in any work that we've read. A supporting character is one who is important to the events of the work, but who is not the main character. Think carefully about how the character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a male character "outstanding," and be sure that you have a clear understanding of the difference between a main character and a supporting character.

4. **[Supporting Character—Female]** Who was the most ▶

## TEACHER TALK

## Posting Poetry

[An earlier message in this thread suggested investing in a lucite sign holder, such as diners use to display a menu, to display witticisms that are changed regularly to generate student curiosity.]

The mention of lucite sign holders reminds me of a great idea I stole and adapted from Georgia Heard's *AWAKENING THE HEART*. Take a group of kids on a tour of the school, with notebooks in hand. Have them look for places all over the school where people tend to congregate or stand in line that have spaces for posting poetry.

After the tour, put all the sites you've discovered on a master list and let individuals sign up to select and post an appropriate poem for each place. Maybe food poems along cafeteria lines . . . water poems near drinking fountains . . . or any poems they like and want to share.

Include student-written poetry as well as works of the pros, and change them every week or month. When we did it, we used cheap page protectors, but I love the idea of using lucite holders. Maybe you could even get a mini-grant for them. . . .

Another variation is adapted from "Poetry in Motion," a New York City project that put poetry on subway trains. We haven't done this yet, but my partner and I thought of putting poetry on school buses. The Lucite holders would be perfect for this, too.

***Gloria Pipkin***
***gpipkin@i-1.net***

*Note: The May issue of NCTE's newspaper,* THE COUNCIL CHRONICLE *will include an article on the Idaho Skylights project, in which poets and writers were invited to share their work with students on school buses. Visit the Web site at http://english.boisestate.edu/idahoskylights/main2.htm.*

outstanding female supporting character in the literature that we've read this term?

Your choice should be a supporting character in any work that we've read. A supporting character is one who is important to the events of the work, but who is not the main character. Think carefully about how the character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a female character "outstanding," and be sure that you have a clear understanding of the difference between a main character and a supporting character.

5. **[Setting]** What was the most outstanding setting in the literature that we've read this term?

A work can include more than one setting—for instance, there may be several inside rooms that are treated as different settings, or an entire house may work as a setting juxtaposed to an outside setting, an outbuilding like a barn, or a location such as a specific street in a city. Think carefully about how the setting you choose is explained, described, and developed—and in particular, think about what makes this setting important to the work as a whole. An outstanding setting is more than a well-described place—be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a setting "outstanding."

6. **[Animal Character]** What was the most outstanding animal character in the literature that we've read this term?

The animal may have had a major role in the work or may have been something of a supporting or symbolic character. Think carefully about how the animal character you choose is explained, described, and developed. Give attention to the ways that this animal character is important to the work—is it symbolically important? Does it drive the plot? What would be lost if it were not there? Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes this character "outstanding."

7. **[Short Story]** What was the most outstanding short story that we've read this term?

Think carefully about the short story that you choose—all the aspects of the story should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as character, setting, plot, structure, tone, point of view, and style. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a short story "outstanding."

8. **[Poem]** What was the most outstanding poem that we've read this term?

Think carefully about the poem that you choose—all the aspects of the poem should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as symbolism, structure, tone, point of view, rhyme, rhythm, and style. Additionally, account for conventions that apply to the kind of poem you've selected (for example, a dramatic monologue or a haiku). Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a poem "outstanding."

9. **[Play]** What was the most outstanding play that we've read this term?

Think carefully about the play that you choose—all the aspects of the play should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as character, setting, plot, structure, stage direction, and style. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a play "outstanding."

10. **[Novel]** What was the most outstanding novel that we've read this term?

Think carefully about the novel that you choose—all the aspects of the novel should unite in an exemplary piece of literature. You should account for such aspects as character, setting, plot, structure, tone, point of view, and style. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a novel "outstanding."

11. **[Adaptation of Myth or Folk Tale]** What was the most outstanding adaptation of a myth or folk tale that you found in a piece of literature that we've read this term?

Think about the relationship between the original myth or folk tale and its representation in a more recent work. How has the original been adapted in the new version, and why has it been included? How does the adapted myth or folk tale add to the work in which it appears? Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes an adaptation "outstanding."

12. **[Descriptive Passage (50 words or less)]** What was the most outstanding descriptive passage in the literature that we've read this term?

The passage can describe anything: a character, a setting, an event, and so forth. Think carefully about how the descriptive setting that you choose works. What kind of detail does it use? What literary techniques does it rely on? And, in particular, think about what makes this description important to the work as a whole. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a descriptive passage "outstanding." Write a paper that explains your selection, supports your choice, and includes comparisons to other candidates that you considered. Your paper should show readers why the passage that you've chosen really does stand out.

13. **[Sentence]** What was the most outstanding sentence in the literature that we've read this term?

The sentence can serve any purpose in the text—exposition, description, and so forth. Think carefully about how the sentence that you choose works. What kind of detail does it use? What literary techniques does it rely on? And,

▶

in particular, think about what makes this sentence important to the work as a whole. Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a sentence "outstanding."

14. **[Plot]** What was the most outstanding plot in the literature that we've read this term?

Think carefully about the plot you choose—how is it structured, what are the key turning points or events, and how do the components combine in an overall structure that is unique or exemplary? Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a plot "outstanding."

15. **[Use of Symbolism]** What was the most outstanding use of symbolism in the literature that we've read this term?

Think carefully about the symbol that you choose—how is it symbolic? What does it symbolize? How is the symbol important to the work as a whole? Why does it stand out? Be sure that you have clear criteria for what makes a symbol "outstanding."

***Traci Gardner is NCTE Online Resources Manager.***

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## FOCUS ON LITERARY TERMS

# Foregrounding and Privileging

*This exercise is reprinted from* LITERARY TERMS: A PRACTICAL GLOSSARY *(NCTE, 1999).* LITERARY TERMS *includes examples drawn from classic literary sources as well as from popular books, films, and television shows, combined with brief activities to help students develop a working knowledge of the concepts.*

*To order* LITERARY TERMS: A PRACTICAL GLOSSARY, *call the NCTE Customer Service Department at 800-369-6283. Stock no. 38705-3125; price: $21.95 ($15.95 NCTE members.)*

### *To get you thinking*

In the space below, write the meaning these words have in "everyday" use. (Use a dictionary if you are unsure.)

foreground: _____

_____

_____

privilege: _____

_____

_____

Underneath these definitions, indicate how these terms might be applied to the study of literary texts. What could they refer to?

### *Theory*

In every text we read, some features seem more obvious or prominent than others. This kind of emphasis is often explained with the terms *foregrounding* and *privileging*. We can say that foregrounding refers to the emphasis placed on certain features of the text (words, phrases, and so on), whereas privileging refers to the degree of importance attached to particular meanings.

Particular elements of a text are not foregrounded or privileged by the text itself. They are the combined effect of ways of organizing the text (textual organization) and ways of reading (reading practices).

Certain features in a text may be emphasized through a variety of techniques, including the selection of detail, repetition, exaggeration, and contrast. When some aspects of a text are emphasized in this way, we say that the concepts they refer to have been foregrounded.

For example:

In this extract from Charles Dickens's novel, *HARD TIMES*, repetition and selection of detail have been used to foreground the "mechanical" style of the teacher, Mr. Thomas Gradgrind. (The scene is set in a nineteenth-century schoolroom.)

> "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of service to them. . ."
>
> The scene was a plain bare monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. . .
>
> "Girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger, "I don't know that girl. Who is that girl?"
>
> "Sissy Jupe, sir," explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.
>
> "Sissy is not a name," said Mr. Gradgrind. "Don't call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia."

We could say that this extract foregrounds the rigid discipline of Thomas Gradgrind's approach to teaching through repetition ("Facts") and through details such as the numbering of the students.

Dickens's novel is often read as an attack on "cold and unfeeling" forms of education. Read in this way, the text seems to place a higher value on emotions and relationships than on "cold facts." That is, in foregrounding the "mechanical," it *privileges* the personal/humane. However, different readings of the text might place the emphasis ▶

elsewhere. To a culture which values factual knowledge over feelings, this text might seem to offer a positive image of rigorous instruction. In such a reading, the same textual details might be *foregrounded*, but an opposing set of values would be *privileged*.

By exploring a text in terms of foregrounding and privileging, we can begin to see how certain attitudes and values are promoted by particular readings.

### *Practice*

This next extract is from Joseph Conrad's novel *HEART OF DARKNESS*, a text which is now seen as offensively racist in many respects. It is narrated by Charlie Marlowe, the captain of a steamer traveling down the Congo during the European invasion of Africa.

> Now and then a boat from the shore gave me a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies steamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality; an intense energy that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at.

1. This description of the people in the boat can be read as *foregrounding* physical appearance. It describes the people as mere bodies, as something "to be looked at." Underline the words and phrases from the passage which emphasise the physical appearance of the people. For example, "the white of their eyeballs."

2. European culture has traditionally privileged the mind over body. Mind and "spirit" have been regarded as having a higher value than the body. In this passage, the foregrounding of the Africans' bodies has a number of effects:

- it obscures the mental and spiritual qualities of the Africans
- by associating the Africans with nature (the surf) it sets them up as a "reverse image" of the European narrator (who therefore represents "culture")
- it constructs the narrator as "mind" rather than body

Through this process the Africans are "made visible," while the European captain remains hidden and escapes description and judgment. In this way the European perspective is privileged, and readers are invited to take up this privileged position. We can demonstrate this by asking some questions of the passage. Indicate your answers to the questions below: African or European?

- Who looks or sees in the passage?
- Who is looked at or seen?
- Who "knows" in the passage?
- Who is "known"?
- Who takes comfort?
- Who is comfort taken from?
- Who is presented as body?
- Who is presented as mind?
- Which of these positions has the most power?

3. Which of the following might be effective ways of counteracting these effects of privileging? Rank the possibilities from 1 (most effective) to 5 (least effective).

- Alternating the narration between two points of view—African and European
- Refusing to read the book
- Remembering that the work is fictional, and arguing that it has no effect on the "real world"
- Publishing and promoting African accounts of the European invasion
- Reading "against the grain"—reading the book as racist propaganda by foregrounding the European's role and privileging the Africans' perspective

What difficulties might there be in these courses of action?

### *Summary*

Foregrounding refers to an emphasis placed on certain features of the text (words, phrases, and so on), whereas privileging refers to the promotion of particular values and meanings. Foregrounding and privileging are the combined effects of textual organization and reading practices.

## TEACHER TALK

## Short Stories with a Focus on India

Can anyone point me in the direction of some short stories that would be of particular interest to students who are part of our town's growing Indian population?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk.***

Although I've used them with developmental college writers, and you may need to search for them in other books, ▶

Verburg (St. Martin's Press) used two excellent short stories in the 3rd edition of OURSELVES AMONG OTHERS.

One is "Our Side of the Fence and Theirs" by Gyanranjan, and the other is "Pom's Engagement" by Ved Mehta.

The first story starts with new neighbors moving in and deals with the reaction of the "established" faction. I have found this story appeals to students of all cultures, but offers extremely rich language, vivid, colorful description, and the chance for students to discuss how they have felt—either as the "established" ones or as the newcomers, to what is happening in their own towns. It was one of the most popular in the anthology when I gave students a chance to self-select the topic for their next essay.

The second story deals with the reaction of an early-adolescent to his sister's arranged marriage. This was interesting to students. In the last five years, I have had three or four students who have joyously asked their parents to arrange marriages, and who defend the practice vigorously. I've had one student (a boy) where the arranged marriage was expected; he planned to marry outside the culture, and was definite on why.

Both stories are easy reads, but carry much meaning and provide good opportunities for share-the-culture discussion.

***Jan Bone***
***janetbone@janbonewriting.com***

For Indian stories, try Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's book of poetry, *LEAVING YUBA CITY*, and her book of short stories, *ARRANGED MARRIAGES*.

***Adrienne Rose***
***arose@wco.com***

## Graphic Organizers

I'm looking for graphic organizers that would help my students in prewriting. Any suggestions?

***Contributed to NCTE-talk.***

Check out this site. There are examples of several kinds. http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/actbank/torganiz.htm

***Susan Erickson***
***suericks@sendit.sendit.nodak.edu***

## *More Suggestions for Introducing Your Students to Short Fiction from and about the Indian Subcontinent*

Short fiction is a genre that has a long literary tradition in India, going back more than two thousand years to the ancient Sanskrit storytelling tradition—of the interwoven story, and the story within a story. The genre continues to be prolific today, and South Asian writers use it in traditional, modern, and postmodern ways.

Since English is one of twenty or more major languages in India, a teacher can choose works written in English or in translation. "Indian English" is recognized as a valid variety of English, containing lexical, idiomatic, and syntactic features typical of South Asian writers. The tradition of fiction in regional languages is also very rich and in many ways more representative of the culture of India, since only a small percentage of the educated elite communicate in English. Regional literatures are increasingly available in translation.

I've selected short fiction in two categories: works by writers living in the Subcontinent (their works are either in English or translated into English); and those by South Asian diaspora writers in the U.S. and Canada.

*UNTOUCHABLE* by Mulkraj Anand (20th-Century Classics). Reprinted 1990. Was one of the earlier "Indian English" writers. *The Untouchable*, originally published in 1935, was inspired by Gandhi's attempts to eliminate the caste system in India. Anand tackles the subject of caste and the treatment of the underprivileged in this short novel, a topic that he returns to in many of his stories.

*FREEDOM SONG: THREE NOVELS* by Amit Chaudhuri. 1999. Chaudhuri weaves into his novels his personal experience, capturing the nuances of his mixed cultural upbringing—of receiving an English education in Bombay and of connecting with family members in Calcutta who know a rich and enviable culture through Bengali.

*ARRANGED MARRIAGE: STORIES* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. 1996. A collection of stories about immigrant Bengalis in the U.S., focusing on women and the problems they encounter in cross-cultural contexts.

*GOLDEN WAIST CHAIN: MODERN HINDI SHORT STORIES*. 1990.

*TRUTH TALES: CONTEMPORARY STORIES BY WOMEN WRITERS OF INDIA*. 1990. Edited by Kali for Women, a women's collective in India.

*WHERE THE OCEANS MEET: A NOVEL* by Bhargavi C. Mandava. 1998. Actually, rather than a novel, this is a collection of ▶

interwoven stories (as mentioned, this popular genre is part of Indian tradition and one that has been used productively by contemporary Indian writers). Includes stories depicting the encounters of an Indian returning to India from the U.S. Portrays a rather negative picture of life in India from the viewpoint of an Indian American.

*A River Sutra* by Gita Mehta. 1994. Although Mehta resides in the U.S., her collection of interwoven stories is set in India, fashioned in the traditional mode of Indian storytelling, yet evoking contemporary India. A charming collection.

*Swimming Lessons : And Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* by Rohinton Mistry. 1997. Mistry resides in Canada but continues to write of India. This is a collection of interwoven stories about the residents of an apartment building in Bombay.

*The Middleman and Other Stories* by Bharati Mukherjee. Reprinted 1999. Mukherjee, who consciously declares herself an Indian-American writer, describes the immigrant experiences of people of color (from India and other parts of the "Third World"). Her stories are often grim and grimy, capturing the clash between immigrant expectations and their encounters with prejudice and hardship when they enter the U.S.

*Malgudi Days* by R.K. Narayan. (Twentieth-Century Classics). 1995. Narayan's gentle humor and wonderful depiction of the fictional village of Malgudi in South India make his books an easy introduction to small-town India.

*Tales from Modern India*, edited by K. Natwar-Singh. 1973. A collection of 20 stories from distinguished Indian writers, representing different languages of India.

*Widows, Wives & Other Heroines: Twelve Stories by Premchand*, edited and translated by David Rubin. Premchand is a key figure in Indian fiction, who wrote in the 1930s, participated in India's freedom movement, and was profoundly influenced by Gandhi's philosophy. He wrote in Hindi/Urdu and did much to shape the modern Indian novel. His subject is rural India and the exploitation of India's peasants, whom he and Gandhi recognized as the soul of India.

*A Death in Delhi; Modern Hindi Short Stories* (UNESCO Collection of Representative Works. Indian Series). 1972. Translated by G. Roadarmel. A good, older collection.

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. 1998. Although this is a full-length novel, I've included it because of its dazzling and playful use of language and its wildly imaginative re-creation of South India. A note of caution: the novel contains explicit sexual situations.

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by Salman Rushdie. 1991. Unlike the more controversial books Rushdie is known for, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is "a delightful tale about a storyteller who loses his skill and a struggle against mysterious forces attempting to block the seas of inspiration from which all stories are derived" (quoted from a review on Amazon.com). Rushdie wrote this story for his son soon after he went into hiding (after the fatwah was issued because of *The Satanic Verses*). *East, West: Stories* by Salman Rushdie. 1994. This is Rushdie at his most accessible (aside from *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*). The stories focus on cultural encounters and offer the reader an introduction to Rushdie's creative use of language.

*Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa. 1992. This is a novel, not a short story, but I'm including it because it vividly recreates an important moment in the history of the Indian Subcontinent. It describes a young girl's life in Lahore at the time of partition—an event whose impact is still to be seen in the relations between India and Pakistan.

*Train to Pakistan* by Kushwant Singh. Reprinted 1990. A short novel that treats of the tragedy at the time of partition, when Pakistan was carved out of India at the end of British rule in 1947. Kushwanat Singh is a visible "senior statesman" on the Indian literary scene.

*Selected Short Stories* by Rabindranath Tagore. Reprinted 1994. Reading Tagore is essential for anyone who wants to know India, particularly Bengal. Tagore—poet, fiction writer, philosopher, painter, educationist, musician—wrote in the first half of the 20th century and was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. One of his most charming short stories, set in Calcutta, is "The Kabuliwallah." Tagore societies abound in the U.S. and around the world.

*Tales of Ancient India*, translated by J. A. Van Buitenan. 1969. A nice collection of stories translated from Sanskrit.

## Other Books of Interest

*Contours of the Heart : South Asians Map North America* by Sunaina Maira and Rajni Srikanth, editors; afterword by Sucheta Mazumdar. 1996.

*Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora* by Women of South Asian Descent Collective (editor). 1993.

***Zarina Manawwar Hock is NCTE Senior Editor.***

## Poetry Newsletter and Contest

April is National Poetry Month—what better time for teachers to order a free newsletter full of ideas and strategies to get students excited about poetry? *POETIC POWER* is a bi-annual newsletter published by Creative Communication. Along with tips on teaching poetry, teachers will find information on how students can participate in a poetry contest judged by educators and how schools can qualify to receive a Language Arts grant. Over $50,000 in awards and grants were given away last year. To receive a free subscription, contact Creative Communication, c/o *POETIC POWER*, 90 North 100 East, Logan, Utah 84321 or visit www.poeticpower.com.

You can also enter your students' poetry (grades 4–12) in a poetry contest sponsored by Creative Communication and give them a chance to win a savings bond and have their poetry published. There are no fees or purchase requirements; this is not a contest where every entry is published.

The contest deadline is April 17, 2000. To enter, send each entry (21 lines or less) with the student's name, grade, school name, and school address, to Creative Communication, c/o *POETIC POWER*, 90 North 100 East, Logan, Utah 84321. For more information, see the Web site at www.poeticpower.com.

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## National TV-Turnoff Week April 24–30, 2000

***"Weren't you bored?"***

*I'm in the middle of an advertising/media unit with my students. Some things I learned:*

*Almost 90% of my students have a television in their bedroom.*

*About 60% of my students have six or more working televisions in their homes.*

*The hours of TV watched range from 8 hours per week to over 32 hours per week, with two major curves, one around 12 hours, the other around 20.*

*My students were astounded to learn that there were only five channels available to us in the New York metropolitan area when I was growing up, that we owned one television, that all we had was black and white, and that stations went off the air at night."*

*Their consistent question? "Weren't you bored?"*

***Ed Taylor, Joan Burds, or Carol***
***textoravis@brick.net***

National TV-Turnoff Week is part of a broadly supported effort to reduce the amount of television Americans watch. The annual event, which takes place during the last week of April, helps move beyond the old discussions about program content and instead focuses on what all TV-viewing displaces: creativity, productivity, healthy physical activity, civic engagement, reading, thinking, and doing.

This April 24–30, 2000, millions of individuals around the country and abroad will voluntarily turn off their TV sets for seven days and rediscover that life can be more constructive, rewarding, healthy—even informed—with more time and less TV.

To get involved in the fifth annual National TV-Turnoff Week, consider ordering a copy of the TV-Free American comprehensive "Organizer's Kit" for $15.00. This 48-page guidebook includes pledge cards, posters, bumper stickers, essays, and facts/figures such as these:

Hours per year the average American youth watches television: 1154.
Hours per year the average American youth spends in school: 900.
Percentage of teenagers who can name the city where the U.S. Constitution was written (Philadelphia): 25.
Percentage of teenagers who know where you find the zip code 90210: 75

For more information, including background reading, membership details, and links to related sites, visit www.tvfa.org/turnoff.html.

## A Source for "Chee's Daughter"

Several readers have inquired about a source for the story "Chee's Daughter" by Juanita Platero and Siyowin Miller, featured in a recent "Focus on Literature" by Larry Johannessen (*NOTES PLUS*, January 1999).

This story is available in a small volume titled *PEOPLE TO REMEMBER* (Houghton Mifflin, 1993). You may need to enlist the help of your local librarian to locate a copy of the book or contact the publisher directly (800-225-3362) to purchase a copy.

*PEOPLE TO REMEMBER*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1993) (The Literature Experience 1993 Series) 62 pp. ISBN: 039561-8460 (pbk). Price: $11.04.

## LETTERS

### *Thank You*

Currently I am a graduate student enrolled in a Human Relations course at St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota. This course focuses on how we, as future educators, need to be aware of multicultural and lifestyle issues. Focusing recently on biased and unbiased print has brought this journal to my attention.

While volunteering at a local high school, a teacher gave me a copy of the *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* to look at. I was very impressed with what I found. The August 1999 issue offers a number of topics supporting cultural and lifestyle diversity. I was particularly pleased with the article on "Gay/Lesbian/Straight Educators Network." As a student I frequently consult educational journals for my coursework and this was the first mention I have seen regarding this issue. I also was delighted to see the information on "Educating for Diversity." The strong support for these issues is an important area of concern!

I know many times as consumers we write only to complain about a product. Hopefully this sincere praise will encourage NCTE to continue to include these diverse articles in future journals. I definitely plan to subscribe to the journal as I start my career in education. Thank you for your progressive steps toward diverse educational lessons.

***Michelle H. Voit, Student of English Education,***
***St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota***

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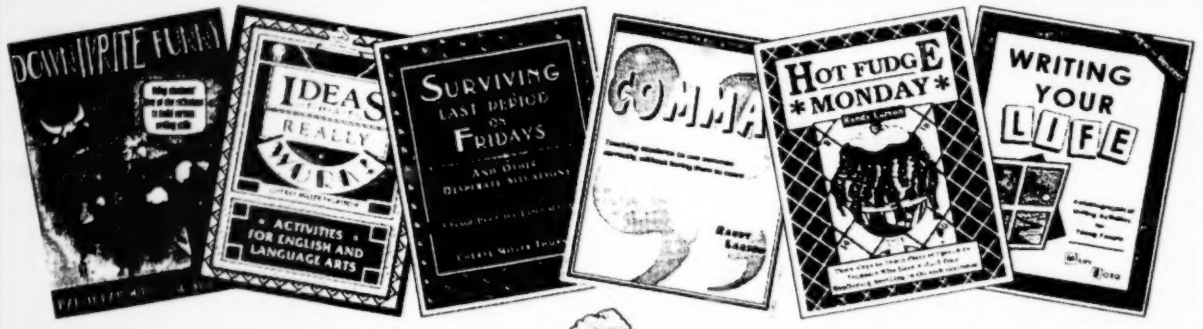


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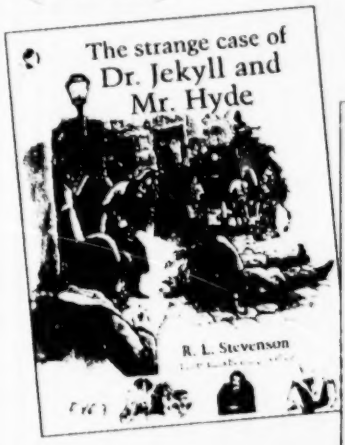


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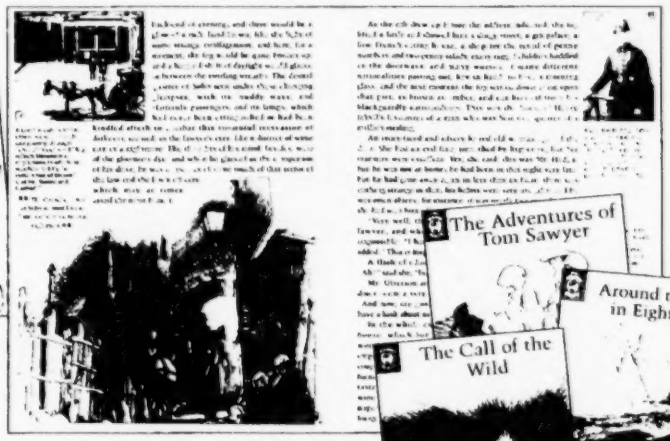

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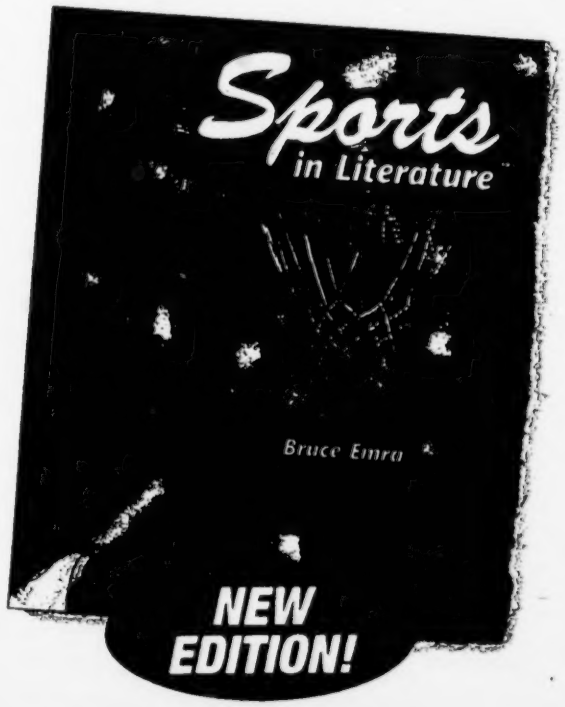


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